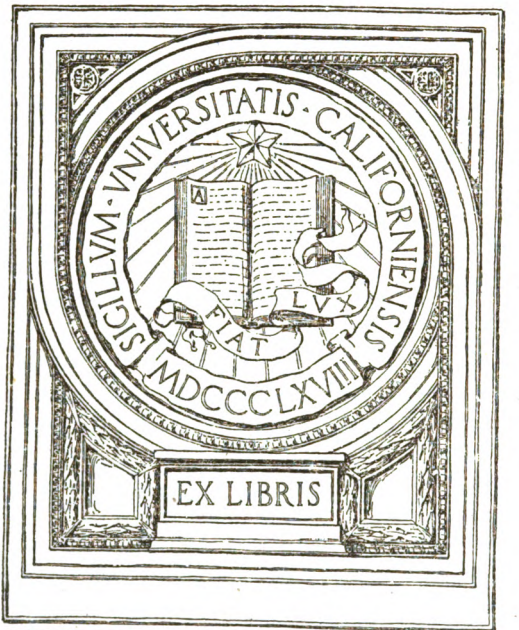

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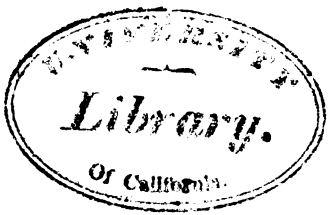

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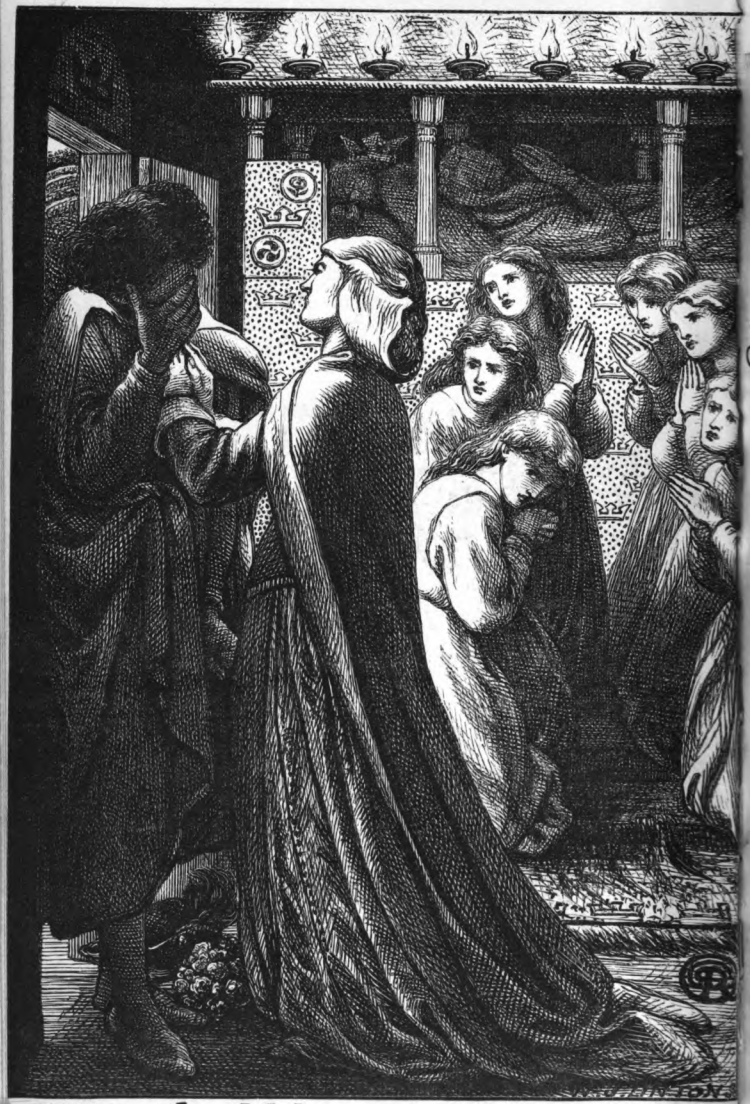

You should have wept her yesterday

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THE PRINCE'S PROGRESS
AND OTHER POEMS
BY CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

The long hours go and come and go

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THE

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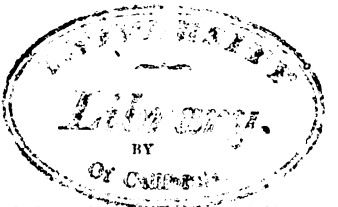

BY

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

WITH TWO DESIGNS BY D. G. ROSSETTI.

London:

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1866.

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TO

MY MOTHER,

IN ALL REVERENCE AND LOVE,

I INSCRIBE THIS BOOK.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE PRINCE'S PROGRESS	1
MAIDEN-SONG	31
JESSIE CAMERON	45
SPRING QUIET	52
THE POOR GHOST	54
A PORTRAIT	57
DREAM-LOVE	59
TWICE	64
SONGS IN A CORNFIELD	68
A YEAR'S WINDFALLS	75
THE QUEEN OF HEARTS	82
ONE DAY	84
A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW	86
LIGHT LOVE	92
A DREAM	97
A RING POSY	98
BEAUTY IS VAIN	100
LADY MAGGIE	102
WHAT WOULD I GIVE?	106
THE BOURNE	107
SUMMER	108
AUTUMN	110

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PAGE

THE GHOST'S PETITION 114
MEMORY 120
A ROYAL PRINCESS 123
SHALL I FORGET? 134
VANITY OF VANITIES 135
L. E. L. 136
LIFE AND DEATH 139
BIRD OR BEAST? 141
EVE 143
GROWN AND FLOWN 148
A FARM WALK . . . . . .
SOMEWHERE OR OTHER 155
A CHILL 156
CHILD'S TALK IN APRIL 157
GONE FOR EVER 161
UNDER THE ROSE 163

DEVOTIONAL PIECES.

DESPISED AND REJECTED 195
LONG BARREN 199
IF ONLY 201
DOST THOU NOT CARE? 202
WEARY IN WELL-DOING 204
MARTYRS' SONG 206
AFTER THIS THE JUDGMENT 210
GOOD FRIDAY 214
THE LOWEST PLACE 216

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THE PRINCE'S PROGRESS.

Till all sweet gums and juices flow,
Till the blossom of blossoms blow,
The long hours go and come and go,
  The bride she sleepeth, waketh, sleepeth,
Waiting for one whose coming is slow :—
    Hark ! the bride weepeth.

"How long shall I wait, come heat come rime ?"—
"Till the strong Prince comes, who must come in time"
(Her women say), "there's a mountain to climb,
  A river to ford. Sleep, dream and sleep :
Sleep" (they say) : "we've muffled the chime,
    Better dream than weep."

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In his world-end palace the strong Prince sat,
Taking his ease on cushion and mat,
Close at hand lay his staff and his hat.
"When wilt thou start? the bride waits, O youth."—
"Now the moon's at full; I tarried for that,
Now I start in truth.

"But tell me first, true voice of my doom,
Of my veiled bride in her maiden bloom;
Keeps she watch through glare and through gloom,
Watch for me asleep and awake?"—
"Spell-bound she watches in one white room,
And is patient for thy sake.

"By her head lilies and rosebuds grow;
The lilies droop, will the rosebuds blow?
The silver slim lilies hang the head low;
Their stream is scanty, their sunshine rare;
Let the sun blaze out, and let the stream flow,
They will blossom and wax fair.

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"Red and white poppies grow at her feet,
The blood-red wait for sweet summer heat,
Wrapped in bud-coats hairy and neat;
But the white buds swell, one day they will burst,
Will open their death-cups drowsy and sweet—
Which will open the first?"

Then a hundred sad voices lifted a wail,
And a hundred glad voices piped on the gale:
"Time is short, life is short," they took up the tale:
"Life is sweet, love is sweet, use to-day while you may;
Love is sweet, and to-morrow may fail;
Love is sweet, use to-day."

While the song swept by, beseeching and meek,
Up rose the Prince with a flush on his cheek,
Up he rose to stir and to seek,
Going forth in the joy of his strength;
Strong of limb if of purpose weak,
Starting at length.

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Forth he set in the breezy morn,
Crossing green fields of nodding corn,
As goodly a Prince as ever was born ;
Carolling with the carolling lark ;—
Sure his bride will be won and worn,
Ere fall of the dark.

So light his step, so merry his smile,
A milkmaid loitered beside a stile,
Set down her pail and rested awhile,
A wave-haired milkmaid, rosy and white ;
The Prince, who had journeyed at least a mile,
Grew athirst at the sight.

" Will you give me a morning draught ? "—
" You're kindly welcome," she said, and laughed.
He lifted the pail, new milk he quaffed ;
Then wiping his curly black beard like silk :
" Whitest cow that ever was calved
Surely gave you this milk."

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Was it milk now, or was it cream?
Was she a maid, or an evil dream?
Her eyes began to glitter and gleam;
He would have gone, but he stayed instead;
Green they gleamed as he looked in them:
"Give me my fee," she said.—

"I will give you a jewel of gold."—
"Not so; gold is heavy and cold."—
"I will give you a velvet fold
Of foreign work your beauty to deck."—
"Better I like my kerchief rolled
Light and white round my neck."—

"Nay," cried he, "but fix your own fee."—
She laughed, "You may give the full moon to me;
Or else sit under this apple-tree
Here for one idle day by my side;
After that I'll let you go free,
And the world is wide."

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Loth to stay, but to leave her slack,
He half turned away, then he quite turned back :
For courtesy's sake he could not lack
To redeem his own royal pledge ;
Ahead too the windy heaven lowered black
With a fire-cloven edge.

So he stretched his length in the apple-tree shade,
Lay and laughed and talked to the maid,
Who twisted her hair in a cunning braid
And writhed it shining in serpent-coils,
And held him a day and a night fast laid
In her subtle toils.

At the death of night and the birth of day,
When the owl left off his sober play
And the bat hung himself out of the way,
Woke the song of mavis and merle,
And heaven put off its hodden grey
For mother-o'-pearl.

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Peeped up daisies here and there,
Here, there, and everywhere;
Rose a hopeful lark in the air,
  Spreading out towards the sun his breast;
While the moon set solemn and fair
    Away in the West.

"Up, up, up," called the watchman lark,
In his clear réveillée: "Hearken, oh hark!
Press to the high goal, fly to the mark.
  Up, O sluggard, new morn is born;
If still asleep when the night falls dark,
    Thou must wait a second morn."

"Up, up, up," sad glad voices swelled:
"So the tree falls and lies as it's felled.
Be thy bands loosed, O sleeper, long held
  In sweet sleep whose end is not sweet.
Be the slackness girt and the softness quelled
    And the slowness fleet."

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Off he set. The grass grew rare,
A blight lurked in the darkening air,
The very moss grew hueless and spare,
The last daisy stood all astunt;
Behind his back the soil lay bare,
But barer in front.

A land of chasm and rent, a land
Of rugged blackness on either hand:
If water trickled its track was tanned
With an edge of rust to the chink;
If one stamped on stone or on sand
It returned a clink.

A lifeless land, a loveless land,
Without lair or nest on either hand:
Only scorpions jerked in the sand,
Black as black iron, or dusty pale;
From point to point sheer rock was manned
By scorpions in mail.

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A land of neither life nor death,
Where no man buildeth or fashioneth,
Where none draws living or dying breath;
No man cometh or goeth there,
No man doeth, seeketh, saith,
In the stagnant air.

Some old volcanic upset must
Have rent the crust and blackened the crust;
Wrenched and ribbed it beneath its dust
Above earth's molten centre at seethe,
Heaved and heaped it by huge upthrust
Of fire beneath.

Untrodden before, untrodden since:
Tedious land for a social Prince;
Halting, he scanned the outs and ins,
Endless, labyrinthine, grim,
Of the solitude that made him wince,
Laying wait for him.

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By bulging rock and gaping cleft,
Even of half mere daylight reft,
Rueful he peered to right and left,
Muttering in his altered mood :
"The fate is hard that weaves my weft,
Though my lot be good."

Dim the changes of day to night,
Of night scarce dark to day not bright.
Still his road wound towards the right,
Still he went, and still he went,
Till one night he espied a light,
In his discontent.

Out it flashed from a yawn-mouthed cave,
Like a red-hot eye from a grave.
No man stood there of whom to crave
Rest for wayfarer plodding by :
Though the tenant were churl or knave
The Prince might try.

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In he passed and tarried not,
Groping his way from spot to spot,
Towards where the cavern flare glowed hot :—
An old, old mortal, cramped and double,
Was peering into a seething-pot,
In a world of trouble.

The veriest atomy he looked,
With grimy fingers clutching and crooked,
Tight skin, a nose all bony and hooked,
And a shaking, sharp, suspicious way ;
His blinking eyes had scarcely brooked
The light of day.

Stared the Prince, for the sight was new ;
Stared, but asked without more ado :
" May a weary traveller lodge with you,
Old father, here in your lair ?
In your country the inns seem few,
And scanty the fare."

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The head turned not to hear him speak;
The old voice whistled as through a leak
(Out it came in a quavering squeak):
"Work for wage is a bargain fit:
If there's aught of mine that you seek
You must work for it.

"Buried alive from light and air
This year is the hundredth year,
I feed my fire with a sleepless care,
Watching my potion wane or wax:
Elixir of Life is simmering there,
And but one thing lacks.

"If you're fain to lodge here with me,
Take that pair of bellows you see—
Too heavy for my old hands they be—
Take the bellows and puff and puff:
When the steam curls rosy and free
The broth's boiled enough.

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"Then take your choice of all I have;
I will give you life if you crave.
Already I'm mildewed for the grave,
So first myself I must drink my fill:
But all the rest may be yours, to save
Whomever you will."

"Done," quoth the Prince, and the bargain stood.
First he piled on resinous wood,
Next plied the bellows in hopeful mood;
Thinking, "My love and I will live.
If I tarry, why life is good,
And she may forgive."

The pot began to bubble and boil;
The old man cast in essence and oil,
He stirred all up with a triple coil
Of gold and silver and iron wire,
Dredged in a pinch of virgin soil,
And fed the fire.

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But still the steam curled watery white;
Night turned to day and day to night;
One thing lacked, by his feeble sight
Unseen, unguessed by his feeble mind:
Life might miss him, but Death the blight
Was sure to find.

So when the hundredth year was full
The thread was cut and finished the school.
Death snapped the old worn-out tool,
Snapped him short while he stood and stirred
(Though stiff he stood as a stiff-necked mule)
With never a word.

Thus at length the old crab was nipped.
The dead hand slipped, the dead finger dipped
In the broth as the dead man slipped,—
That same instant, a rosy red
Flushed the steam, and quivered and clipped
Round the dead old head.

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The last ingredient was supplied
(Unless the dead man mistook or lied).
Up started the Prince, he cast aside
The bellows plied through the tedious trial,
Made sure that his host had died,
And filled a phial.

"One night's rest," thought the Prince: "This done,
Forth I start with the rising sun:
With the morrow I rise and run,
Come what will of wind or of weather.
This draught of Life when my Bride is won
We'll drink together."

Thus the dead man stayed in his grave,
Self-chosen, the dead man in his cave;
There he stayed, were he fool or knave,
Or honest seeker who had not found:
While the Prince outside was prompt to crave
Sleep on the ground.

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"If she watches, go bid her sleep;
Bid her sleep, for the road is steep:
He can sleep who holdeth her cheap,
Sleep and wake and sleep again.
Let him sow, one day he shall reap,
Let him sow the grain.

"When there blows a sweet garden rose,
Let it bloom and wither if no man knows:
But if one knows when the sweet thing blows,
Knows, and lets it open and drop,
If but a nettle his garden grows
He hath earned the crop."

Through his sleep the summons rang,
Into his ears it sobbed and it sang.
Slow he woke with a drowsy pang,
Shook himself without much debate,
Turned where he saw green branches hang,
Started though late.

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For the black land was travelled o'er,
He should see the grim land no more.
A flowering country stretched before
His face when the lovely day came back:
He hugged the phial of Life he bore,
And resumed his track.

By willow courses he took his path,
Spied what a nest the kingfisher hath,
Marked the fields green to aftermath,
Marked where the red-brown field-mouse ran,
Loitered awhile for a deep-stream bath,
Yawned for a fellow-man.

Up on the hills not a soul in view,
In the vale not many nor few;
Leaves, still leaves, and nothing new.
It's oh for a second maiden, at least,
To bear the flagon, and taste it too,
And flavour the feast.

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Lagging he moved, and apt to swerve ;
Lazy of limb, but quick of nerve.
At length the water-bed took a curve,
The deep river swept its bankside bare ;
Waters streamed from the hill-reserve—
Waters here, waters there.

High above, and deep below,
Bursting, bubbling, swelling the flow,
Like hill-torrents after the snow,—
Bubbling, gurgling, in whirling strife,
Swaying, sweeping, to and fro,—
He must swim for his life.

Which way ?—which way ?—his eyes grew dim
With the dizzying whirl—which way to swim ?
The thunderous downshoot deafened him ;
Half he choked in the lashing spray :
Life is sweet, and the grave is grim—
Which way ?—which way ?

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A flash of light, a shout from the strand:
"This way—this way; here lies the land!"
His phial clutched in one drowning hand;
He catches—misses—catches a rope;
His feet slip on the slipping sand:
Is there life?—is there hope?

Just saved, without pulse or breath,—
Scarcely saved from the gulp of death;
Laid where a willow shadoweth—
Laid where a swelling turf is smooth.
(O Bride! but the Bridegroom lingereth
For all thy sweet youth.)

Kind hands do and undo,
Kind voices whisper and coo:
"I will chafe his hands"—"And I"—"And you
Raise his head, put his hair aside."
(If many laugh, one well may rue:
Sleep on, thou Bride.)

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So the Prince was tended with care:
One wrung foul ooze from his clustered hair;
Two chafed his hands, and did not spare;
But one held his drooping head breast-high,
Till his eyes oped, and at unaware
They met eye to eye.

Oh, a moon face in a shadowy place,
And a light touch and a winsome grace,
And a thrilling tender voice that says:
"Safe from waters that seek the sea—
Cold waters by rugged ways—
Safe with me."

While overhead bird whistles to bird,
And round about plays a gamesome herd:
"Safe with us"—some take up the word—
"Safe with us, dear lord and friend:
All the sweeter if long deferred
Is rest in the end."

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Had he stayed to weigh and to scan,
He had been more or less than a man:
He did what a young man can,
  Spoke of toil and an arduous way—
Toil to-morrow, while golden ran
    The sands of to-day.

Slip past, slip fast,
Uncounted hours from first to last,
Many hours till the last is past,
  Many hours dwindling to one—
One hour whose die is cast,
    One last hour gone.

Come, gone—gone for ever—
Gone as an unreturning river—
Gone as to death the merriest liver—
  Gone as the year at the dying fall—
To-morrow, to-day, yesterday, never—
    Gone once for all.

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Came at length the starting-day,
With last words, and last, last words to say,
With bodiless cries from far away—
  Chiding wailing voices that rang
Like a trumpet-call to the tug and fray;
    And thus they sang:

"Is there life?—the lamp burns low;
Is there hope?—the coming is slow:
The promise promised so long ago,
  The long promise, has not been kept.
Does she live?—does she die?—she slumbers so
    Who so oft has wept.

"Does she live?—does she die?—she languisheth
As a lily drooping to death,
As a drought-worn bird with failing breath,
  As a lovely vine without a stay,
As a tree whereof the owner saith,
    'Hew it down to-day.'"

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Stung by that word the Prince was fain
To start on his tedious road again.
He crossed the stream where a ford was plain,
He clomb the opposite bank though steep,
And swore to himself to strain and attain
Ere he tasted sleep.

Huge before him a mountain frowned
With foot of rock on the valley ground,
And head with snows incessant crowned,
And a cloud mantle about its strength,
And a path which the wild goat hath not found
In its breadth and length.

But he was strong to do and dare:
If a host had withstood him there,
He had braved a host with little care
In his lusty youth and his pride,
Tough to grapple though weak to snare.
He comes, O Bride.

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Up he went where the goat scarce clings,
Up where the eagle folds her wings,
Past the green line of living things,
Where the sun cannot warm the cold,—
Up he went as a flame enrings
Where there seems no hold.

Up a fissure barren and black,
Till the eagles tired upon his track,
And the clouds were left behind his back,
Up till the utmost peak was past.
Then he gasped for breath and his strength fell slack;
He paused at last.

Before his face a valley spread
Where fatness laughed, wine, oil, and bread,
Where all fruit-trees their sweetness shed,
Where all birds made love to their kind,
Where jewels twinkled, and gold lay red
And not hard to find.

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Midway down the mountain side
(On its green slope the path was wide)
Stood a house for a royal bride,
Built all of changing opal stone,
The royal palace, till now descried
In his dreams alone.

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Less bold than in days of yore,
Doubting now though never before,
Doubting he goes and lags the more:
Is the time late? does the day grow dim?
Rose, will she open the crimson core
Of her heart to him?

Take heart of grace! the potion of Life
May go far to woo him a wife:
If she frown, yet a lover's strife
Lightly raised can be laid again:
A hasty word is never the knife
To cut love in twain.

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Far away stretched the royal land,
Fed by dew, by a spice-wind fanned :
Light labour more, and his foot would stand
On the threshold, all labour done ;
Easy pleasure laid at his hand,
And the dear Bride won.

His slackening steps pause at the gate—
Does she wake or sleep ?—the time is late—
Does she sleep now, or watch and wait ?
She has watched, she has waited long,
Watching athwart the golden grate
With a patient song.

Fling the golden portals wide,
The Bridegroom comes to his promised Bride ;
Draw the gold-stiff curtains aside,
Let them look on each other's face,
She in her meekness, he in his pride—
Day wears apace.

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Day is over, the day that wore.
What is this that comes through the door,
The face covered, the feet before?
  This that coming takes his breath;
This Bride not seen, to be seen no more
    Save of Bridegroom Death?

Veiled figures carrying her
Sweep by yet make no stir;
There is a smell of spice and myrrh,
  A bride-chant burdened with one name;
The bride-song rises steadier
    Than the torches' flame:

"Too late for love, too late for joy,
  Too late, too late!
You loitered on the road too long,
  You trifled at the gate:
The enchanted dove upon her branch
    Died without a mate;

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The enchanted princess in her tower
Slept, died, behind the grate;
Her heart was starving all this while
You made it wait.

"Ten years ago, five years ago,
One year ago,
Even then you had arrived in time,
Though somewhat slow;
Then you had known her living face
Which now you cannot know:
The frozen fountain would have leaped,
The buds gone on to blow,
The warm south wind would have awaked
To melt the snow.

"Is she fair now as she lies?
Once she was fair;
Meet queen for any kingly king,
With gold-dust on her hair.

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Now these are poppies in her locks,
White poppies she must wear;
Must wear a veil to shroud her face
And the want graven there:
Or is the hunger fed at length,
Cast off the care?

"We never saw her with a smile
Or with a frown;
Her bed seemed never soft to her,
Though tossed of down;
She little heeded what she wore,
Kirtle, or wreath, or gown;
We think her white brows often ached
Beneath her crown,
Till silvery hairs showed in her locks
That used to be so brown.

"We never heard her speak in haste:
Her tones were sweet,

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And modulated just so much
As it was meet:
Her heart sat silent through the noise
And concourse of the street.
There was no hurry in her hands,
No hurry in her feet;
There was no bliss drew nigh to her,
That she might run to greet.

"You should have wept her yesterday,
Wasting upon her bed:
But wherefore should you weep to-day
That she is dead?
Lo, we who love weep not to-day,
But crown her royal head.
Let be these poppies that we strew,
Your roses are too red:
Let be these poppies, not for you
Cut down and spread."

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MAIDEN-SONG.

Long ago and long ago,
  And long ago still,
There dwelt three merry maidens
  Upon a distant hill.
One was tall Meggan,
  And one was dainty May,
But one was fair Margaret,
  More fair than I can say,
Long ago and long ago.

When Meggan plucked the thorny rose,
  And when May pulled the briar,
Half the birds would swoop to see,

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Half the beasts draw nigher ;
Half the fishes of the streams
Would dart up to admire :
But when Margaret plucked a flag-flower,
Or poppy hot aflame,
All the beasts and all the birds
And all the fishes came
To her hand more soft than snow.

Strawberry leaves and May-dew
In brisk morning air,
Strawberry leaves and May-dew
Make maidens fair.
" I go for strawberry leaves,"
Meggan said one day :
" Fair Margaret can bide at home,
But you come with me, May ;
Up the hill and down the hill,
Along the winding way
You and I are used to go."

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So these two fair sisters
  Went with innocent will
Up the hill and down again,
  And round the homestead hill:
While the fairest sat at home,
  Margaret like a queen,
Like a blush-rose, like the moon
  In her heavenly sheen,
Fragrant-breathed as milky cow
  Or field of blossoming bean,
Graceful as an ivy bough
  Born to cling and lean;
Thus she sat to sing and sew.

When she raised her lustrous eyes
  A beast peeped at the door;
When she downward cast her eyes
  A fish gasped on the floor;
When she turned away her eyes

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A bird perched on the sill,
Warbling out its heart of love,
Warbling warbling still,
With pathetic pleadings low.

Light-foot May with Meggan
Sought the choicest spot,
Clothed with thyme-alternate grass:
Then, while day waxed hot,
Sat at ease to play and rest,
A gracious rest and play;
The loveliest maidens near or far,
When Margaret was away,
Who sat at home to sing and sew.

Sun-glow flushed their comely cheeks,
Wind-play tossed their hair,
Creeping things among the grass
Stroked them here and there;

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Meggan piped a merry note,
A fitful wayward lay,
While shrill as bird on topmost twig
Piped merry May;
Honey-smooth the double flow.

Sped a herdsman from the vale,
Mounting like a flame,
All on fire to hear and see
With floating locks he came.
Looked neither north nor south,
Neither east nor west,
But sat him down at Meggan's feet
As love-bird on his nest,
And wooed her with a silent awe,
With trouble not expressed;
She sang the tears into his eyes,
The heart out of his breast:
So he loved her, listening so.

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She sang the heart out of his breast,
The words out of his tongue;
Hand and foot and pulse he paused
Till her song was sung.
Then he spoke up from his place
Simple words and true:
"Scanty goods have I to give,
Scanty skill to woo;
But I have a will to work,
And a heart for you:
Bid me stay or bid me go."

Then Meggan mused within herself:
"Better be first with him,
Than dwell where fairer Margaret sits,
Who shines my brightness dim,
For ever second where she sits,
However fair I be:
I will be lady of his love,

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And he shall worship me;
I will be lady of his herds
And stoop to his degree,
At home where kids and fatlings grow."

Sped a shepherd from the height
Headlong down to look,
(White lambs followed, lured by love
Of their shepherd's crook):
He turned neither east nor west,
Neither north nor south,
But knelt right down to May, for love
Of her sweet-singing mouth;
Forgot his flocks, his panting flocks
In parching hill-side drouth;
Forgot himself for weal or woe.

Trilled her song and swelled her song
With maiden coy caprice

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In a labyrinth of throbs,
  Pauses, cadences ;
Clear-noted as a dropping brook,
  Soft-noted like the bees,
Wild-noted as the shivering wind
  Forlorn through forest trees :
Love-noted like the wood-pigeon
  Who hides herself for love,
Yet cannot keep her secret safe,
  But cooes and cooes thereof :
Thus the notes rang loud or low.

He hung breathless on her breath ;
  Speechless, who listened well ;
Could not speak or think or wish
  Till silence broke the spell.
Then he spoke, and spread his hands
  Pointing here and there :
" See my sheep and see the lambs,

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Twin lambs which they bare.
All myself I offer you,
All my flocks and care,
Your sweet song hath moved me so."

In her fluttered heart young May
Mused a dubious while:
"If he loves me as he says"—
Her lips curved with a smile:
"Where Margaret shines like the sun,
I shine but like a moon;
If sister Meggan makes her choice
I can make mine as soon;
At cockcrow we were sister-maids,
We may be brides at noon."
Said Meggan, "Yes;" May said not "No."

Fair Margaret stayed alone at home,
Awhile she sang her song,

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Awhile sat silent, then she thought:
"My sisters loiter long."
That sultry noon had waned away,
Shadows had waxen great:
"Surely," she thought within herself,
"My sisters loiter late."
She rose, and peered out at the door,
With patient heart to wait,
And heard a distant nightingale
Complaining of its mate;
Then down the garden slope she walked,
Down to the garden gate,
Leaned on the rail and waited so.

The slope was lightened by her eyes
Like summer lightning fair,
Like rising of the haloed moon
Lightened her glimmering hair,
While her face lightened like the sun
Whose dawn is rosy white.

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Thus crowned with maiden majesty
She peered into the night,
Looked up the hill and down the hill,
To left hand and to right,
Flashing like fire-flies to and fro.

Waiting thus in weariness
She marked the nightingale
Telling, if any one would heed,
Its old complaining tale.
Then lifted she her voice and sang,
Answering the bird :
Then lifted she her voice and sang,
Such notes were never heard
From any bird when Spring's in blow.

The king of all that country
Coursing far, coursing near,

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Curbed his amber-bitted steed,
Coursed amain to hear;
All his princes in his train,
Squire, and knight, and peer,
With his crown upon his head,
His sceptre in his hand,
Down he fell at Margaret's knees
Lord king of all that land,
To her highness bending low.

Every beast and bird and fish
Came mustering to the sound,
Every man and every maid
From miles of country round:
Meggan on her herdsman's arm,
With her shepherd May,
Flocks and herds trooped at their heels
Along the hill-side way;
No foot too feeble for the ascent,

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Not any head too grey ;
Some were swift and none were slow.

So Margaret sang her sisters home
In their marriage mirth ;
Sang free birds out of the sky,
Beasts along the earth,
Sang up fishes of the deep—
All breathing things that move
Sang from far and sang from near
To her lovely love ;
Sang together friend and foe ;

Sang a golden-bearded king
Straightway to her feet,
Sang him silent where he knelt
In eager anguish sweet.
But when the clear voice died away,
When longest echoes died,
He stood up like a royal man

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And claimed her for his bride.
So three maids were wooed and won
In a brief May-tide,
Long ago and long ago.

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JESSIE CAMERON.

"Jessie, Jessie Cameron,
Hear me but this once," quoth he.
"Good luck go with you, neighbour's son,
But I'm no mate for you," quoth she.
Day was verging toward the night
There beside the moaning sea,
Dimness overtook the light
There where the breakers be.
"O Jessie, Jessie Cameron,
I have loved you long and true."—
"Good luck go with you, neighbour's son,
But I'm no mate for you."

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She was a careless, fearless girl,
And made her answer plain,
Outspoken she to earl or churl,
Kindhearted in the main,
But somewhat heedless with her tongue
And apt at causing pain;
A mirthful maiden she and young,
Most fair for bliss or bane.
"Oh, long ago I told you so,
I tell you so to-day:
Go you your way, and let me go
Just my own free way."

The sea swept in with moan and foam
Quickening the stretch of sand;
They stood almost in sight of home;
He strove to take her hand.
"Oh, can't you take your answer then,
And won't you understand?

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For me you're not the man of men,
I've other plans are planned.
You're good for Madge, or good for Cis,
Or good for Kate, may be:
But what's to me the good of this
While you're not good for me?"

They stood together on the beach,
They two alone,
And louder waxed his urgent speech,
His patience almost gone:
"Oh, say but one kind word to me,
Jessie, Jessie Cameron."—
"I'd be too proud to beg," quoth she,
And pride was in her tone.
And pride was in her lifted head,
And in her angry eye,
And in her foot, which might have fled,
But would not fly.

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Some say that he had gipsy blood,
That in his heart was guile:
Yet he had gone through fire and flood
Only to win her smile.
Some say his grandam was a witch,
A black witch from beyond the Nile,
Who kept an image in a niche
And talked with it the while.
And by her hut far down the lane
Some say they would not pass at night,
Lest they should hear an unked strain
Or see an unked sight.

Alas, for Jessie Cameron!—
The sea crept moaning, moaning nigher:
She should have hastened to begone,—
The sea swept higher, breaking by her:
She should have hastened to her home
While yet the west was flushed with fire,

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But now her feet are in the foam,
The sea-foam sweeping higher.
O mother, linger at your door,
And light your lamp to make it plain,
But Jessie she comes home no more,
No more again.

They stood together on the strand,
They only each by each;
Home, her home, was close at hand,
Utterly out of reach.
Her mother in the chimney nook
Heard a startled sea-gull screech,
But never turned her head to look
Towards the darkening beach:
Neighbours here and neighbours there
Heard one scream, as if a bird
Shrilly screaming cleft the air:—
That was all they heard.

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Jessie she comes home no more,
Comes home never;
Her lover's step sounds at his door
No more for ever.
And boats may search upon the sea
And search along the river,
But none know where the bodies be:
Sea-winds that shiver,
Sea-birds that breast the blast,
Sea-waves swelling,
Keep the secret first and last
Of their dwelling.

Whether the tide so hemmed them round
With its pitiless flow,
That when they would have gone they found
No way to go;
Whether she scorned him to the last
With words flung to and fro,

Digitized by Google

Or clung to him when hope was past,
None will ever know:
Whether he helped or hindered her,
Threw up his life or lost it well,
The troubled sea for all its stir
Finds no voice to tell.

Only watchers by the dying
Have thought they heard one pray
Wordless, urgent; and replying
One seem to say him nay:
And watchers by the dead have heard
A windy swell from miles away,
With sobs and screams, but not a word
Distinct for them to say:
And watchers out at sea have caught
Glimpse of a pale gleam here or there,
Come and gone as quick as thought,
Which might be hand or hair.

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SPRING QUIET.

Gone were but the Winter,
Come were but the Spring,
I would go to a covert
Where the birds sing;

Where in the whitethorn
Singeth a thrush,
And a robin sings
In the holly-bush.

Full of fresh scents
Are the budding boughs
Arching high over
A cool green house:

Digitized by Google

Full of sweet scents,
And whispering air
Which sayeth softly:
"We spread no snare;

"Here dwell in safety,
Here dwell alone,
With a clear stream
And a mossy stone.

"Here the sun shineth
Most shadily;
Here is heard an echo
Of the far sea,
Though far off it be."

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THE POOR GHOST.

"Oh whence do you come, my dear friend, to me,
With your golden hair all fallen below your knee,
And your face as white as snowdrops on the lea,
And your voice as hollow as the hollow sea?"

"From the other world I come back to you,
My locks are uncurled with dripping drenching dew.
You know the old, whilst I know the new:
But to-morrow you shall know this too."

"Oh not to-morrow into the dark, I pray;
Oh not to-morrow, too soon to go away:
Here I feel warm and well-content and gay:
Give me another year, another day."

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"Am I so changed in a day and a night
That mine own only love shrinks from me with fright,
Is fain to turn away to left or right
And cover up his eyes from the sight?"

"Indeed I loved you, my chosen friend,
I loved you for life, but life has an end;
Through sickness I was ready to tend:
But death mars all, which we cannot mend.

"Indeed I loved you; I love you yet
If you will stay where your bed is set,
Where I have planted a violet
Which the wind waves, which the dew makes wet."

"Life is gone, then love too is gone,
It was a reed that I leant upon:
Never doubt I will leave you alone
And not wake you rattling bone with bone.

Digitized by Google

"I go home alone to my bed,
Dug deep at the foot and deep at the head,
Roofed in with a load of lead,
Warm enough for the forgotten dead.

"But why did your tears soak through the clay,
And why did your sobs wake me where I lay?
I was away, far enough away:
Let me sleep now till the Judgment Day."

Digitized by Google

A PORTRAIT.

I.

SHE gave up beauty in her tender youth,
Gave all her hope and joy and pleasant ways;
She covered up her eyes lest they should gaze
On vanity, and chose the bitter truth.
Harsh towards herself, towards others full of ruth,
Servant of servants, little known to praise,
Long prayers and fasts trenched on her nights and days:
She schooled herself to sights and sounds uncouth
That with the poor and stricken she might make
A home, until the least of all sufficed
Her wants; her own self learned she to forsake,

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Counting all earthly gain but hurt and loss.
So with calm will she chose and bore the cross
And hated all for love of Jesus Christ.

II.

They knelt in silent anguish by her bed,
And could not weep; but calmly there she lay.
All pain had left her; and the sun's last ray
Shone through upon her, warming into red
The shady curtains. In her heart she said:
"Heaven opens; I leave these and go away;
The Bridegroom calls,—shall the Bride seek to stay?"
Then low upon her breast she bowed her head.
O lily flower, O gem of priceless worth,
O dove with patient voice and patient eyes,
O fruitful vine amid a land of dearth,
O maid replete with loving purities,
Thou bowedst down thy head with friends on earth
To raise it with the saints in Paradise.

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DREAM-LOVE.

YOUNG LOVE lies sleeping
  In May-time of the year,
Among the lilies,
  Lapped in the tender light:
White lambs come grazing,
  White doves come building there;
And round about him
  The May-bushes are white.

Soft moss the pillow
  For oh, a softer cheek;
Broad leaves cast shadow
  Upon the heavy eyes:

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There winds and waters
  Grow lulled and scarcely speak;
There twilight lingers
  The longest in the skies.

Young Love lies dreaming;
  But who shall tell the dream?
A perfect sunlight
  On rustling forest tips;
Or perfect moonlight
  Upon a rippling stream;
Or perfect silence,
  Or song of cherished lips.

Burn odours round him
  To fill the drowsy air;
Weave silent dances
  Around him to and fro;

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For oh, in waking
The sights are not so fair,
And song and silence
Are not like these below.

Young Love lies dreaming
Till summer days are gone,—
Dreaming and drowsing
Away to perfect sleep:
He sees the beauty
Sun hath not looked upon,
And tastes the fountain
Unutterably deep.

Him perfect music
Doth hush unto his rest,
And through the pauses
The perfect silence calms:

Digitized by Google

Oh, poor the voices
  Of earth from east to west,
And poor earth's stillness
  Between her stately palms.

Young Love lies drowsing
  Away to poppied death;
Cool shadows deepen
  Across the sleeping face:
So fails the summer
  With warm, delicious breath;
And what hath autumn
  To give us in its place?

Draw close the curtains
  Of branched evergreen;
Change cannot touch them
  With fading fingers sere:

Digitized by Google

Here the first violets
  Perhaps will bud unseen,
And a dove, may be,
  Return to nestle here.

Digitized by Google

TWICE.

I took my heart in my hand
(O my love, O my love),
I said: Let me fall or stand,
Let me live or die,
But this once hear me speak—
(O my love, O my love)—
Yet a woman's words are weak;
You should speak, not I.

You took my heart in your hand
With a friendly smile,
With a critical eye you scanned,
Then set it down,

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And said: It is still unripe,
Better wait awhile;
Wait while the skylarks pipe,
Till the corn grows brown.

As you set it down it broke—
Broke, but I did not wince;
I smiled at the speech you spoke,
At your judgment that I heard:
But I have not often smiled
Since then, nor questioned since,
Nor cared for corn-flowers wild,
Nor sung with the singing bird.

I take my heart in my hand,
O my God, O my God,
My broken heart in my hand:
Thou hast seen, judge Thou.

Digitized by Google

My hope was written on sand,
O my God, O my God;
Now let Thy judgment stand—
Yea, judge me now.

This contemned of a man,
This marred one heedless day,
This heart take Thou to scan
Both within and without:
Refine with fire its gold,
Purge Thou its dross away—
Yea, hold it in Thy hold,
Whence none can pluck it out.

I take my heart in my hand—
I shall not die, but live—
Before Thy face I stand;
I, for Thou callest such:

Digitized by Google

All that I have I bring,
All that I am I give,
Smile Thou and I shall sing,
But shall not question much.

Digitized by Google

SONGS IN A CORNFIELD.

A song in a cornfield
  Where corn begins to fall,
Where reapers are reaping,
  Reaping one, reaping all.
Sing pretty Lettice,
  Sing Rachel, sing May;
Only Marian cannot sing
  While her sweetheart's away.

Where is he gone to
  And why does he stay?
He came across the green sea
  But for a day,
Across the deep green sea

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To help with the hay.
His hair was curly yellow
And his eyes were grey,
He laughed a merry laugh
And said a sweet say.
Where is he gone to
That he comes not home?
To-day or to-morrow
He surely will come.
Let him haste to joy
Lest he lag for sorrow,
For one weeps to-day
Who'll not weep to-morrow:
To-day she must weep
For gnawing sorrow,
To-night she may sleep
And not wake to-morrow.

May sang with Rachel
In the waxing warm weather,

Digitized by Google

Lettice sang with them,
They sang all together :—

"Take the wheat in your arm
Whilst day is broad above,
Take the wheat to your bosom,
But not a false false love.
Out in the fields
Summer heat gloweth,
Out in the fields
Summer wind bloweth,
Out in the fields
Summer friend showeth,
Out in the fields
Summer wheat groweth :
But in the winter
When summer heat is dead
And summer wind has veered
And summer friend has fled,
Only summer wheat remaineth,

Digitized by Google

White cakes and bread.
Take the wheat, clasp the wheat
That's food for maid and dove;
Take the wheat to your bosom,
But not a false false love."

A silence of full noontide heat
Grew on them at their toil:
The farmer's dog woke up from sleep,
The green snake hid her coil.
Where grass stood thickest, bird and beast
Sought shadows as they could,
The reaping men and women paused
And sat down where they stood;
They ate and drank and were refreshed,
For rest from toil is good.

While the reapers took their ease,
Their sickles lying by,
Rachel sang a second strain,
And singing seemed to sigh:—

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"There goes the swallow—
Could we but follow!
Hasty swallow stay,
Point us out the way;
Look back swallow, turn back swallow, stop swallow.

"There went the swallow—
Too late to follow:
Lost our note of way,
Lost our chance to-day;
Good bye swallow, sunny swallow, wise swallow.

"After the swallow
All sweet things follow:
All things go their way,
Only we must stay,
Must not follow; good bye swallow, good swallow."

Then listless Marian raised her head
Among the nodding sheaves;

Digitized by Google

Her voice was sweeter than that voice ;
She sang like one who grieves :
Her voice was sweeter than its wont
Among the nodding sheaves ;
All wondered while they heard her sing
Like one who hopes and grieves :—

" Deeper than the hail can smite,
Deeper than the frost can bite,
Deep asleep through day and night,
Our delight.

" Now thy sleep no pang can break,
No to-morrow bid thee wake,
Not our sobs who sit and ache
For thy sake.

" Is it dark or light below ?
Oh, but is it cold like snow ?
Dost thou feel the green things grow
Fast or slow ?

Digitized by Google

"Is it warm or cold beneath,
Oh, but is it cold like death?
Cold like death, without a breath,
Cold like death?"

If he comes to-day
He will find her weeping;
If he comes to-morrow
He will find her sleeping;
If he comes the next day
He'll not find her at all,
He may tear his curling hair,
Beat his breast and call.

Digitized by Google

A YEAR'S WINDFALLS.

On the wind of January
Down flits the snow,
Travelling from the frozen North
As cold as it can blow.
Poor robin redbreast,
Look where he comes;
Let him in to feel your fire,
And toss him of your crumbs.

On the wind in February
Snowflakes float still,
Half inclined to turn to rain,
Nipping, dripping, chill.

Digitized by Google

Then the thaws swell the streams,
And swollen rivers swell the sea :—
If the winter ever ends
How pleasant it will be.

In the wind of windy March
The catkins drop down,
Curly, caterpillar-like,
Curious green and brown.
With concourse of nest-building birds
And leaf-buds by the way,
We begin to think of flowers
And life and nuts some day.

With the gusts of April
Rich fruit-tree blossoms fall,
On the hedged-in orchard-green,
From the southern wall.

Digitized by Google

Apple-trees and pear-trees
Shed petals white or pink,
Plum-trees and peach-trees;
While sharp showers sink and sink.

Little brings the May breeze
Beside pure scent of flowers,
While all things wax and nothing wanes
In lengthening daylight hours.
Across the hyacinth beds
The wind lags warm and sweet,
Across the hawthorn tops,
Across the blades of wheat.

In the wind of sunny June
Thrives the red rose crop,
Every day fresh blossoms blow
While the first leaves drop;

Digitized by Google

White rose and yellow rose
And moss-rose choice to find,
And the cottage cabbage-rose
Not one whit behind.

On the blast of scorched July
Drives the pelting hail,
From thunderous lightning-clouds, that blot
Blue heaven grown lurid-pale.
Weedy waves are tossed ashore,
Sea-things strange to sight
Gasp upon the barren shore
And fade away in light.

In the parching August wind,
Cornfields bow the head,
Sheltered in round valley depths,
On low hills outspread.

Digitized by Google

Early leaves drop loitering down
Weightless on the breeze,
Firstfruits of the year's decay
From the withering trees.

In brisk wind of September
The heavy-headed fruits
Shake upon their bending boughs
And drop from the shoots;
Some glow golden in the sun,
Some show green and streaked,
Some set forth a purple bloom,
Some blush rosy-cheeked.

In strong blast of October
At the equinox,
Stirred up in his hollow bed
Broad ocean rocks;

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Plunge the ships on his bosom,
Leaps and plunges the foam,—
It's oh! for mothers' sons at sea,
That they were safe at home.

In slack wind of November
The fog forms and shifts;
All the world comes out again
When the fog lifts.
Loosened from their sapless twigs
Leaves drop with every gust;
Drifting, rustling, out of sight
In the damp or dust.

Last of all, December,
The year's sands nearly run,
Speeds on the shortest day,
Curtails the sun;

Digitized by Google

With its bleak raw wind
  Lays the last leaves low,
Brings back the nightly frosts,
  Brings back the snow.

Digitized by Google

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS.

How comes it, Flora, that, whenever we
Play cards together, you invariably,
    However the pack parts,
    Still hold the Queen of Hearts?

I've scanned you with a scrutinizing gaze,
Resolved to fathom these your secret ways:
    But, sift them as I will,
    Your ways are secret still.

I cut and shuffle; shuffle, cut, again;
But all my cutting, shuffling, proves in vain:
    Vain hope, vain forethought too;
    That Queen still falls to you.

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I dropped her once, prepense ; but, ere the deal
Was dealt, your instinct seemed her loss to feel :
"There should be one card more,"
You said, and searched the floor.

I cheated once ; I made a private notch
In Heart-Queen's back, and kept a lynx-eyed watch ;
Yet such another back
Deceived me in the pack :

The Queen of Clubs assumed by arts unknown
An imitative dint that seemed my own ;
This notch, not of my doing,
Misled me to my ruin.

It baffles me to puzzle out the clue,
Which must be skill, or craft, or luck in you :
Unless, indeed, it be
Natural affinity.

Digitized by Google

ONE DAY.

I WILL tell you when they met:
In the limpid days of Spring;
Elder boughs were budding yet,
Oaken boughs looked wintry still,
But primrose and veined violet
In the mossful turf were set,
While meeting birds made haste to sing
And build with right good will.

I will tell you when they parted:
When plenteous Autumn sheaves were brown,
Then they parted heavy-hearted;
The full rejoicing sun looked down

Digitized by Google

As grand as in the days before;
Only they had lost a crown;
Only to them those days of yore
Could come back nevermore.

When shall they meet? I cannot tell,
Indeed, when they shall meet again,
Except some day in Paradise:
For this they wait, one waits in pain.
Beyond the sea of death love lies
For ever, yesterday, to-day;
Angels shall ask them, "Is it well?"
And they shall answer, "Yea."

Digitized by Google

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW.

"Croak, croak, croak,"
Thus the Raven spoke,
Perched on his crooked tree
As hoarse as hoarse could be.
Shun him and fear him,
Lest the Bridegroom hear him;
Scout him and rout him
With his ominous eye about him.

Yet, "Croak, croak, croak,"
Still tolled from the oak;
From that fatal black bird,
Whether heard or unheard:

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"O ship upon the high seas,
Freighted with lives and spices,
Sink, O ship," croaked the Raven:
"Let the Bride mount to heaven."

In a far foreign land
Upon the wave-edged sand,
Some friends gaze wistfully
Across the glittering sea.
"If we could clasp our sister,"
Three say, "now we have missed her!"
"If we could kiss our daughter!"
Two sigh across the water.

Oh, the ship sails fast
With silken flags at the mast,
And the home-wind blows soft;
But a Raven sits aloft,

Digitized by Google

Chuckling and choking,
Croaking, croaking, croaking :—
Let the beacon-fire blaze higher ;
Bridegroom, watch ; the Bride draws nigher.

On a sloped sandy beach,
Which the spring-tide billows reach,
Stand a watchful throng
Who have hoped and waited long :
"Fie on this ship, that tarries
With the priceless freight it carries.
The time seems long and longer :
O languid wind, wax stronger ;"—

Whilst the Raven perched at ease
Still croaks and does not cease,
One monotonous note
Tolled from his iron throat :

Digitized by Google

"No father, no mother,
But I have a sable brother:
He sees where ocean flows to,
And he knows what he knows too."

A day and a night
They kept watch worn and white;
A night and a day
For the swift ship on its way:
For the Bride and her maidens
—Clear chimes the bridal cadence—
For the tall ship that never
Hove in sight for ever.

On either shore, some
Stand in grief loud or dumb
As the dreadful dread
Grows certain though unsaid.

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For laughter there is weeping,
And waking instead of sleeping,
And a desperate sorrow
Morrow after morrow.

Oh, who knows the truth,
How she perished in her youth,
And like a queen went down
Pale in her royal crown:
How she went up to glory
From the sea-foam chill and hoary,
From the sea-depth black and riven
To the calm that is in Heaven?

They went down, all the crew,
The silks and spices too,
The great ones and the small,
One and all, one and all.

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Was it through stress of weather,
Quicksands, rocks, or all together?
Only the Raven knows this,
And he will not disclose this.—

After a day and year
The bridal bells chime clear;
After a year and a day
The Bridegroom is brave and gay:
Love is sound, faith is rotten;
The old Bride is forgotten:—
Two ominous Ravens only
Remember, black and lonely.

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LIGHT LOVE.

"Oh, sad thy lot before I came,
But sadder when I go;
My presence but a flash of flame,
A transitory glow
Between two barren wastes like snow.
What wilt thou do when I am gone,
Where wilt thou rest, my dear?
For cold thy bed to rest upon,
And cold the falling year
Whose withered leaves are lost and sere."

She hushed the baby at her breast,
She rocked it on her knee:

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"And I will rest my lonely rest,
Warmed with the thought of thee,
Rest lulled to rest by memory."
She hushed the baby with her kiss,
She hushed it with her breast:
"Is death so sadder much than this—
Sure death that builds a nest
For those who elsewhere cannot rest?"

"Oh, sad thy note, my mateless dove,
With tender nestling cold;
But hast thou ne'er another love
Left from the days of old,
To build thy nest of silk and gold,
To warm thy paleness to a blush
When I am far away—
To warm thy coldness to a flush,
And turn thee back to May,
And turn thy twilight back to day?"

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She did not answer him again,
But leaned her face aside,
Wrung with the pang of shame and pain,
And sore with wounded pride:
He knew his very soul had lied.
She strained his baby in her arms,
His baby to her heart:
"Even let it go, the love that harms:
We twain will never part;
Mine own, his own, how dear thou art."

"Now never teaze me, tender-eyed,
Sigh-voiced," he said in scorn:
"For nigh at hand there blooms a bride,
My bride before the morn;
Ripe-blooming she, as thou forlorn.
Ripe-blooming she, my rose, my peach;
She wooes me day and night:
I watch her tremble in my reach;

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She reddens, my delight;
She ripens, reddens in my sight."

"And is she like a sunlit rose?
Am I like withered leaves?
Haste where thy spicèd garden blows:
But in bare Autumn eves
Wilt thou have store of harvest sheaves?
Thou leavest love, true love behind,
To seek a love as true;
Go, seek in haste: but wilt thou find?
Change new again for new;
Pluck up, enjoy—yea, trample too.

"Alas for her, poor faded rose,
Alas for her, like me,
Cast down and trampled in the snows."
"Like thee? nay, not like thee:

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She leans, but from a guarded tree.
Farewell, and dream as long ago,
Before we ever met:
Farewell; my swift-paced horse seems slow."
She raised her eyes, not wet
But hard, to Heaven: "Does God forget?"

Digitized by Google

A DREAM.

SONNET.

ONCE in a dream (for once I dreamed of you)
We stood together in an open field;
Above our heads two swift-winged pigeons wheeled,
Sporting at ease and courting full in view.
When loftier still a broadening darkness flew,
Down-swooping, and a ravenous hawk revealed;
Too weak to fight, too fond to fly, they yield;
So farewell life and love and pleasures new.
Then as their plumes fell fluttering to the ground,
Their snow-white plumage flecked with crimson drops,
I wept, and thought I turned towards you to weep:
But you were gone; while rustling hedgerow tops
Bent in a wind which bore to me a sound
Of far-off piteous bleat of lambs and sheep.

Digitized by Google

A RING POSY.

Jess and Jill are pretty girls,
  Plump and well to do,
In a cloud of windy curls:
  Yet I know who
Loves me more than curls or pearls.

I'm not pretty, not a bit;
  Thin and sallow-pale;
When I trudge along the street
  I don't need a veil:
Yet I have one fancy hit.

Digitized by Google

Jess and Jill can trill and sing
With a flute-like voice,
Dance as light as bird on wing,
Laugh for careless joys:
Yet it's I who wear the ring.

Jess and Jill will mate some day,
Surely, surely;
Ripen on to June through May,
While the sun shines make their hay,
Slacken steps demurely:
Yet even there I lead the way.

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BEAUTY IS VAIN.

WHILE roses are so red,
  While lilies are so white,
Shall a woman exalt her face
  Because it gives delight?
She's not so sweet as a rose,
  A lily's straighter than she,
And if she were as red or white
  She'd be but one of three.

Whether she flush in love's summer
  Or in its winter grow pale,
Whether she flaunt her beauty
  Or hide it away in a veil,

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Be she red or white,
And stand she erect or bowed,
Time will win the race he runs with her
And hide her away in a shroud.

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LADY MAGGIE.

You must not call me Maggie, you must not call me
Dear,
For I'm Lady of the Manor now stately to see;
And if there comes a babe, as there may some happy
year,
'T will be little lord or lady at my knee.

Oh, but what ails you, my sailor cousin Phil,
That you shake and turn white like a cockcrow ghost?
You're as white as I turned once down by the mill,
When one told me you and ship and crew were lost:

Philip my playfellow, when we were boy and girl
(It was the Miller's Nancy told it to me),
Philip with the merry life in lip and curl,
Philip my playfellow drowned in the sea!

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I thought I should have fainted, but I did not faint;
I stood stunned at the moment, scarcely sad,
Till I raised my wail of desolate complaint
For you, my cousin, brother, all I had.

They said I looked so pale—some say so fair—
My lord stopped in passing to soothe me back to life:
I know I missed a ringlet from my hair
Next morning; and now I am his wife.

Look at my gown, Philip, and look at my ring,
I'm all crimson and gold from top to toe:
All day long I sit in the sun and sing,
Where in the sun red roses blush and blow.

And I'm the rose of roses says my lord;
And to him I'm more than the sun in the sky,
While I hold him fast with the golden cord
Of a curl, with the eyelash of an eye.

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His mother said "fie," and his sisters cried "shame,"
His highborn ladies cried "shame" from their place:
They said "fie" when they only heard my name,
But fell silent when they saw my face.

Am I so fair, Philip? Philip, did you think
I was so fair when we played boy and girl,
Where blue forget-me-nots bloomed on the brink
Of our stream which the mill-wheel sent awhirl?

If I was fair then sure I'm fairer now,
Sitting where a score of servants stand,
With a coronet on high days for my brow
And almost a sceptre for my hand.

You're but a sailor, Philip, weatherbeaten brown,
A stranger on land and at home on the sea,
Coasting as best you may from town to town:
Coasting along do you often think of me?

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I'm a great lady in a sheltered bower,
With hands grown white through having nought to do:
Yet sometimes I think of you hour after hour
Till I nigh wish myself a child with you.

Digitized by Google

WHAT WOULD I GIVE?

WHAT would I give for a heart of flesh to warm me through,
Instead of this heart of stone ice-cold whatever I do;
Hard and cold and small, of all hearts the worst of all.

What would I give for words, if only words would come;
But now in its misery my spirit has fallen dumb:
Oh, merry friends, go your way, I have never a word to say.

What would I give for tears, not smiles but scalding tears,
To wash the black mark clean, and to thaw the frost of years,
To wash the stain ingrain and to make me clean again.

Digitized by Google

THE BOURNE.

UNDERNEATH the growing grass,
Underneath the living flowers,
Deeper than the sound of showers:
There we shall not count the hours
By the shadows as they pass.

Youth and health will be but vain,
Beauty reckoned of no worth:
There a very little girth
Can hold round what once the earth
Seemed too narrow to contain.

Digitized by Google

SUMMER.

WINTER is cold-hearted,
  Spring is yea and nay,
Autumn is a weathercock
  Blown every way:
Summer days for me
When every leaf is on its tree;

When Robin's not a beggar,
  And Jenny Wren's a bride,
And larks hang singing, singing, singing,
  Over the wheat-fields wide,
  And anchored lilies ride,
And the pendulum spider
  Swings from side to side,

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And blue-black beetles transact business,
  And gnats fly in a host,
And furry caterpillars hasten
  That no time be lost,
And moths grow fat and thrive,
And ladybirds arrive.

Before green apples blush,
  Before green nuts embrown,
Why, one day in the country
  Is worth a month in town;
  Is worth a day and a year
Of the dusty, musty, lag-last fashion
  That days drone elsewhere.

Digitized by Google

AUTUMN.

I DWELL alone—I dwell alone, alone,
Whilst full my river flows down to the sea,
Gilded with flashing boats
That bring no friend to me:
O love-songs, gurgling from a hundred throats,
O love-pangs, let me be.

Fair fall the freighted boats which gold and stone
And spices bear to sea:
Slim, gleaming maidens swell their mellow notes,
Love-promising, entreating—
Ah! sweet, but fleeting—
Beneath the shivering, snow-white sails.
Hush! the wind flags and fails—

Digitized by Google

Hush! they will lie becalmed in sight of strand—
Sight of my strand, where I do dwell alone;
Their songs wake singing echoes in my land—
They cannot hear me moan.

One latest, solitary swallow flies
Across the sea, rough autumn-tempest tost,
Poor bird, shall it be lost?
Dropped down into this uncongenial sea,
With no kind eyes
To watch it while it dies,
Unguessed, uncared for, free:
Set free at last,
The short pang past,
In sleep, in death, in dreamless sleep locked fast.

Mine avenue is all a growth of oaks,
Some rent by thunder strokes,
Some rustling leaves and acorns in the breeze;
Fair fall my fertile trees,
That rear their goodly heads, and live at ease.

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A spider's web blocks all mine avenue;
He catches down and foolish painted flies,
That spider wary and wise.
Each morn it hangs a rainbow strung with dew
Betwixt boughs green with sap,
So fair, few creatures guess it is a trap:
I will not mar the web,
Though sad I am to see the small lives ebb.

It shakes—my trees shake—for a wind is roused
In cavern where it housed:
Each white and quivering sail,
Of boats among the water leaves
Hollows and strains in the full-throated gale:
Each maiden sings again—
Each languid maiden, whom the calm
Had lulled to sleep with rest and spice and balm.
Miles down my river to the sea
They float and wane,
Long miles away from me.

Digitized by Google

Perhaps they say: "She grieves,
Uplifted, like a beacon, on her tower."
Perhaps they say: "One hour
More, and we dance among the golden sheaves."
Perhaps they say: "One hour
More, and we stand,
Face to face, hand in hand;
Make haste, O slack gale, to the looked-for land!"

My trees are not in flower,
I have no bower,
And gusty creaks my tower,
And lonesome, very lonesome, is my strand.

Digitized by Google

THE GHOST'S PETITION.

"THERE'S a footstep coming: look out, and see."—
"The leaves are falling, the wind is calling;
No one cometh across the lea."—

"There's a footstep coming: O sister, look."—
"The ripple flashes, the white foam dashes;
No one cometh across the brook."—

"But he promised that he would come:
To-night, to-morrow, in joy or sorrow,
He must keep his word, and must come home.

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"For he promised that he would come:
His word was given; from earth or heaven,
He must keep his word, and must come home.

"Go to sleep, my sweet sister Jane;
You can slumber, who need not number
Hour after hour, in doubt and pain.

"I shall sit here awhile, and watch;
Listening, hoping, for one hand groping
In deep shadow to find the latch."

After the dark, and before the light,
One lay sleeping; and one sat weeping,
Who had watched and wept the weary night.

After the night, and before the day,
One lay sleeping; and one sat weeping—
Watching, weeping for one away.

Digitized by Google

There came a footstep climbing the stair;
Some one standing out on the landing
Shook the door like a puff of air—

Shook the door, and in he passed.
Did he enter? In the room centre
Stood her husband: the door shut fast.

"O Robin, but you are cold—
Chilled with the night-dew: so lily-white you
Look like a stray lamb from our fold.

"O Robin, but you are late:
Come and sit near me—sit here and cheer me."—
(Blue the flame burnt in the grate.)

"Lay not down your head on my breast:
I cannot hold you, kind wife, nor fold you
In the shelter that you love best.

Digitized by Google

"Feel not after my clasping hand:
I am but a shadow, come from the meadow
Where many lie, but no tree can stand.

"We are trees which have shed their leaves:
Our heads lie low there, but no tears flow there;
Only I grieve for my wife who grieves.

"I could rest if you would not moan
Hour after hour; I have no power
To shut my ears where I lie alone.

"I could rest if you would not cry;
But there's no sleeping while you sit weeping—
Watching, weeping so bitterly."—

"Woe's me! woe's me! for this I have heard.
Oh, night of sorrow!—oh, black to-morrow!
Is it thus that you keep your word?

Digitized by Google

"O you who used so to shelter me
Warm from the least wind—why, now the east wind
Is warmer than you, whom I quake to see.

"O my husband of flesh and blood,
For whom my mother I left, and brother,
And all I had, accounting it good,

"What do you do there, underground,
In the dark hollow? I'm fain to follow.
What do you do there?—what have you found?"—

"What I do there I must not tell:
But I have plenty: kind wife, content ye:
It is well with us—it is well.

"Tender hand hath made our nest;
Our fear is ended, our hope is blended
With present pleasure, and we have rest."—

Digitized by Google

"Oh, but Robin, I'm fain to come,
If your present days are so pleasant;
For my days are so wearisome.

"Yet I'll dry my tears for your sake:
Why should I tease you, who cannot please you
Any more with the pains I take?"

Digitized by Google

MEMORY.

I.

I NURSED it in my bosom while it lived,
I hid it in my heart when it was dead;
In joy I sat alone, even so I grieved
Alone and nothing said.

I shut the door to face the naked truth,
I stood alone—I faced the truth alone,
Stripped bare of self-regard or forms or ruth
Till first and last were shown.

I took the perfect balances and weighed;
No shaking of my hand disturbed the poise;

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Weighed, found it wanting: not a word I said,
But silent made my choice.

None know the choice I made; I make it still.
None know the choice I made and broke my heart,
Breaking mine idol: I have braced my will
Once, chosen for once my part.

I broke it at a blow, I laid it cold,
Crushed in my deep heart where it used to live.
My heart dies inch by inch; the time grows old,
Grows old in which I grieve.

II.

I have a room whereinto no one enters
Save I myself alone:
There sits a blessed memory on a throne,
There my life centres.

Digitized by Google

While winter comes and goes—oh tedious comer !—
And while its nip-wind blows ;
While bloom the bloodless lily and warm rose
Of lavish summer.

If any should force entrance he might see there
One buried yet not dead,
Before whose face I no more bow my head
Or bend my knee there ;

But often in my worn life's autumn weather
I watch there with clear eyes,
And think how it will be in Paradise
When we're together.

Digitized by Google

A ROYAL PRINCESS.

I, A PRINCESS, king-descended, decked with jewels, gilded, drest,
Would rather be a peasant with her baby at her breast,
For all I shine so like the sun, and am purple like the west.

Two and two my guards behind, two and two before,
Two and two on either hand, they guard me evermore;
Me, poor dove, that must not coo—eagle that must not soar.

All my fountains cast up perfumes, all my gardens grow
Scented woods and foreign spices, with all flowers in blow
That are costly, out of season as the seasons go.

Digitized by Google

All my walls are lost in mirrors, whereupon I trace
Self to right hand, self to left hand, self in every place,
Self-same solitary figure, self-same seeking face.

Then I have an ivory chair high to sit upon,
Almost like my father's chair, which is an ivory throne;
There I sit uplift and upright, there I sit alone.

Alone by day, alone by night, alone days without end;
My father and my mother give me treasures, search and spend—
O my father! O my mother! have you ne'er a friend?

As I am a lofty princess, so my father is
A lofty king, accomplished in all kingly subtilties,
Holding in his strong right hand world-kingdoms' balances.

He has quarrelled with his neighbours, he has scourged his foes;

Digitized by Google

Vassal counts and princes follow where his pennon goes,
Long-descended valiant lords whom the vulture knows.

On whose track the vulture swoops, when they ride in state
To break the strength of armies and topple down the great:
Each of these my courteous servant, none of these my mate.

My father counting up his strength sets down with equal pen
So many head of cattle, head of horses, head of men;
These for slaughter, these for breeding, with the how and when.

Some to work on roads, canals; some to man his ships;
Some to smart in mines beneath sharp overseers' whips;
Some to trap fur-beasts in lands where utmost winter nips.

Digitized by Google

Once it came into my heart and whelmed me like a flood,
That these too are men and women, human flesh and blood;
Men with hearts and men with souls, though trodden down like mud.

Our feasting was not glad that night, our music was not gay;
On my mother's graceful head I marked a thread of grey,
My father frowning at the fare seemed every dish to weigh.

I sat beside them sole princess in my exalted place,
My ladies and my gentlemen stood by me on the dais:
A mirror showed me I look old and haggard in the face;

It showed me that my ladies all are fair to gaze upon,
Plump, plenteous-haired, to every one love's secret lore is known,

Digitized by Google

They laugh by day, they sleep by night; ah me, what
is a throne?

The singing men and women sang that night as usual,
The dancers danced in pairs and sets, but music had a
fall,
A melancholy windy fall as at a funeral.

Amid the toss of torches to my chamber back we
swept;
My ladies loosed my golden chain; meantime I could
have wept
To think of some in galling chains whether they waked
or slept.

I took my bath of scented milk, delicately waited on,
They burned sweet things for my delight, cedar and
cinnamon,
They lit my shaded silver lamp and left me there alone.

Digitized by Google

A day went by, a week went by. One day I heard it said :

" Men are clamouring, women, children, clamouring to be fed ;

Men like famished dogs are howling in the streets for bread."

So two whispered by my door, not thinking I could hear,

Vulgar naked truth, ungarnished for a royal ear ;

Fit for cooping in the background, not to stalk so near.

But I strained my utmost sense to catch this truth, and mark :

" There are families out grazing like cattle in the park."

" A pair of peasants must be saved even if we build an ark."

A merry jest, a merry laugh, each strolled upon his way ;

One was my page, a lad I reared and bore with day by day ;

Digitized by Google

One was my youngest maid as sweet and white as
cream in May.

Other footsteps followed softly with a weightier
tramp;
Voices said: "Picked soldiers have been summoned
from the camp
To quell these base-born ruffians who make free to
howl and stamp."

"Howl and stamp?" one answered: "They made free
to hurl a stone
At the minister's state coach, well aimed and stoutly
thrown."
"There's work then for the soldiers, for this rank crop
must be mown."

"One I saw, a poor old fool with ashes on his head,
Whimpering because a girl had snatched his crust of
bread:

Digitized by Google

Then he dropped; when some one raised him, it turned
out he was dead."

"After us the deluge," was retorted with a laugh:
"If bread's the staff of life, they must walk without a
staff."
"While I've a loaf they're welcome to my blessing
and the chaff."

These passed. The king: stand up. Said my father
with a smile:
"Daughter mine, your mother comes to sit with you
awhile,
She's sad to-day, and who but you her sadness can
beguile?"

He too left me. Shall I touch my harp now while I
wait,—
(I hear them doubling guard below before our palace
gate—)

Digitized by Google

Or shall I work the last gold stitch into my veil of state;

Or shall my woman stand and read some unimpassioned scene,
There's music of a lulling sort in words that pause between;
Or shall she merely fan me while I wait here for the queen?

Again I caught my father's voice in sharp word of command:
"Charge!" a clash of steel: "Charge again, the rebels stand.
Smite and spare not, hand to hand; smite and spare not, hand to hand."

There swelled a tumult at the gate, high voices waxing higher;

Digitized by Google

A flash of red reflected light lit the cathedral spire;
I heard a cry for faggots, then I heard a yell for fire.

"Sit and roast there with your meat, sit and bake there with your bread,
You who sat to see us starve," one shrieking woman said:
"Sit on your throne and roast with your crown upon your head."

Nay, this thing will I do, while my mother tarrieth,
I will take my fine spun gold, but not to sew therewith,
I will take my gold and gems, and rainbow fan and wreath;

With a ransom in my lap, a king's ransom in my hand,
I will go down to this people, will stand face to face, will stand
Where they curse king, queen, and princess of this cursed land.

Digitized by Google

They shall take all to buy them bread, take all I have
to give;
I, if I perish, perish; they to-day shall eat and live;
I, if I perish, perish; that's the goal I half conceive:

Once to speak before the world, rend bare my heart
and show
The lesson I have learned which is death, is life, to
know.
I, if I perish, perish; in the name of God I go.

Digitized by Google

SHALL I FORGET?

SHALL I forget on this side of the grave?
I promise nothing: you must wait and see
Patient and brave.
(O my soul, watch with him and he with me.)

Shall I forget in peace of Paradise?
I promise nothing: follow, friend, and see
Faithful and wise.
(O my soul, lead the way he walks with me.)

Digitized by Google

VANITY OF VANITIES.

SONNET.

Ah, woe is me for pleasure that is vain,
Ah, woe is me for glory that is past:
Pleasure that bringeth sorrow at the last,
Glory that at the last bringeth no gain!
So saith the sinking heart; and so again
It shall say till the mighty angel-blast
Is blown, making the sun and moon aghast
And showering down the stars like sudden rain.
And evermore men shall go fearfully
Bending beneath their weight of heaviness;
And ancient men shall lie down wearily,
And strong men shall rise up in weariness;
Yea, even the young shall answer sighingly
Saying one to another: How vain it is!

Digitized by Google

L. E. L.

"Whose heart was breaking for a little love."
E. B. Browning.

Downstairs I laugh, I sport and jest with all:
But in my solitary room above
I turn my face in silence to the wall;
My heart is breaking for a little love.
Though winter frosts are done,
And birds pair every one,
And leaves peep out, for springtide is begun.

I feel no spring, while spring is wellnigh blown,
I find no nest, while nests are in the grove:
Woe's me for mine own heart that dwells alone,

Digitized by Google

My heart that breaketh for a little love.
While golden in the sun
Rivulets rise and run,
While lilies bud, for springtide is begun.

All love, are loved, save only I; their hearts
Beat warm with love and joy, beat full thereof:
They cannot guess, who play the pleasant parts,
My heart is breaking for a little love.
While beehives wake and whirr,
And rabbit thins his fur,
In living spring that sets the world astir.

I deck myself with silks and jewelry,
I plume myself like any mated dove:
They praise my rustling show, and never see
My heart is breaking for a little love.
While sprouts green lavender
With rosemary and myrrh,
For in quick spring the sap is all astir.

Digitized by Google

Perhaps some saints in glory guess the truth,
Perhaps some angels read it as they move,
And cry one to another full of ruth,
"Her heart is breaking for a little love."
Though other things have birth,
And leap and sing for mirth,
When springtime wakes and clothes and feeds the earth.

Yet saith a saint: "Take patience for thy scathe;"
Yet saith an angel: "Wait, for thou shalt prove
True best is last, true life is born of death,
O thou, heart-broken for a little love.
Then love shall fill thy girth,
And love make fat thy dearth,
When new spring builds new heaven and clean new earth."

Digitized by Google

LIFE AND DEATH.

Life is not sweet. One day it will be sweet
To shut our eyes and die:
Nor feel the wild flowers blow, nor birds dart by
With flitting butterfly,
Nor grass grow long above our heads and feet,
Nor hear the happy lark that soars sky high,
Nor sigh that spring is fleet and summer fleet,
Nor mark the waxing wheat,
Nor know who sits in our accustomed seat.

Life is not good. One day it will be good
To die, then live again;
To sleep meanwhile: so not to feel the wane
Of shrunk leaves dropping in the wood,

Digitized by Google

Nor hear the foamy lashing of the main,
Nor mark the blackened bean-fields, nor where stood
Rich ranks of golden grain
Only dead refuse stubble clothe the plain :
Asleep from risk, asleep from pain.

Digitized by Google

BIRD OR BEAST?

Did any bird come flying
After Adam and Eve,
When the door was shut against them
And they sat down to grieve?

I think not Eve's peacock
Splendid to see,
And I think not Adam's eagle;
But a dove may be.

Did any beast come pushing
Through the thorny hedge
Into the thorny thistly world
Out from Eden's edge?

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I think not a lion
Though his strength is such ;
But an innocent loving lamb
May have done as much.

If the dove preached from her bough
And the lamb from his sod,
The lamb and the dove
Were preachers sent from God.

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EVE.

"While I sit at the door
Sick to gaze within
Mine eye weepeth sore
For sorrow and sin:
As a tree my sin stands
To darken all lands;
Death is the fruit it bore.

"How have Eden bowers grown
Without Adam to bend them!
How have Eden flowers blown
Squandering their sweet breath
Without me to tend them!
The Tree of Life was ours,

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Tree twelvefold-fruited,
Most lofty tree that flowers,
Most deeply rooted:
I chose the tree of death.

"Hadst thou but said me nay,
Adam, my brother,
I might have pined away;
I, but none other:
God might have let thee stay
Safe in our garden,
By putting me away
Beyond all pardon.

"I, Eve, sad mother
Of all who must live,
I, not another
Plucked bitterest fruit to give
My friend, husband, lover—

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O wanton eyes run over;
Who but I should grieve?—
Cain hath slain his brother:
Of all who must die mother,
Miserable Eve!"

Thus she sat weeping,
Thus Eve our mother,
Where one lay sleeping
Slain by his brother.
Greatest and least
Each piteous beast
To hear her voice
Forgot his joys
And set aside his feast.

The mouse paused in his walk
And dropped his wheaten stalk;

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Grave cattle wagged their heads
In rumination;
The eagle gave a cry
From his cloud station;
Larks on thyme beds
Forbore to mount or sing;
Bees drooped upon the wing;
The raven perched on high
Forgot his ration;
The conies in their rock,
A feeble nation,
Quaked sympathetical;
The mocking-bird left off to mock;
Huge camels knelt as if
In deprecation;
The kind hart's tears were falling;
Chattered the wistful stork;
Dove-voices with a dying fall
Cooed desolation
Answering grief by grief.

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Only the serpent in the dust
Wriggling and crawling
Grinned an evil grin and thrust
His tongue out with its fork.

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GROWN AND FLOWN.

I LOVED my love from green of Spring
  Until sere Autumn's fall;
But now that leaves are withering
  How should one love at all?
  One heart's too small
For hunger, cold, love, everything.

I loved my love on sunny days
  Until late Summer's wane;
But now that frost begins to glaze
  How should one love again?
  Nay, love and pain
Walk wide apart in diverse ways.

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I loved my love—alas to see
That this should be, alas!
I thought that this could scarcely be,
Yet has it come to pass:
Sweet sweet love was,
Now bitter bitter grown to me.

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A FARM WALK.

THE year stood at its equinox
And bluff the North was blowing,
A bleat of lambs came from the flocks,
Green hardy things were growing;
I met a maid with shining locks
Where milky kine were lowing.

She wore a kerchief on her neck,
Her bare arm showed its dimple,
Her apron spread without a speck,
Her air was frank and simple.

She milked into a wooden pail
And sang a country ditty,

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An innocent fond lovers' tale,
That was not wise nor witty,
Pathetically rustical,
Too pointless for the city.

She kept in time without a beat
As true as church-bell ringers,
Unless she tapped time with her feet,
Or squeezed it with her fingers;
Her clear unstudied notes were sweet
As many a practised singer's.

I stood a minute out of sight,
Stood silent for a minute
To eye the pail, and creamy white
The frothing milk within it;

To eye the comely milking maid
Herself so fresh and creamy:
"Good day to you," at last I said;

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She turned her head to see me:
"Good day," she said with lifted head;
Her eyes looked soft and dreamy,

And all the while she milked and milked
The grave cow heavy-laden:
I've seen grand ladies plumed and silked,
But not a sweeter maiden;

But not a sweeter fresher maid
Than this in homely cotton
Whose pleasant face and silky braid
I have not yet forgotten.

Seven springs have passed since then, as I
Count with a sober sorrow;
Seven springs have come and passed me by,
And spring sets in to-morrow.

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I've half a mind to shake myself
Free just for once from London,
To set my work upon the shelf
And leave it done or undone;

To run down by the early train,
Whirl down with shriek and whistle,
And feel the bluff North blow again,
And mark the sprouting thistle
Set up on waste patch of the lane
Its green and tender bristle,

And spy the scarce-blown violet banks,
Crisp primrose leaves and others,
And watch the lambs leap at their pranks
And butt their patient mothers.

Alas, one point in all my plan
My serious thoughts demur to:

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Seven years have passed for maid and man,
Seven years have passed for her too;

Perhaps my rose is overblown,
Not rosy or too rosy;
Perhaps in farmhouse of her own
Some husband keeps her cosy,
Where I should show a face unknown.
Good bye, my wayside posy.

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SOMEWHERE OR OTHER.

SOMEWHERE or other there must surely be
The face not seen, the voice not heard,
The heart that not yet—never yet—ah me!
Made answer to my word.

Somewhere or other, may be near or far;
Past land and sea, clean out of sight;
Beyond the wandering moon, beyond the star
That tracks her night by night.

Somewhere or other, may be far or near;
With just a wall, a hedge, between;
With just the last leaves of the dying year
Fallen on a turf grown green.

Digitized by Google

A CHILL.

What can lambkins do
All the keen night through?
Nestle by their woolly mother
The careful ewe.

What can nestlings do
In the nightly dew?
Sleep beneath their mother's wing
Till day breaks anew.

If in field or tree
There might only be
Such a warm soft sleeping-place
Found for me!

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CHILD'S TALK IN APRIL.

I WISH you were a pleasant wren,
And I your small accepted mate;
How we'd look down on toilsome men!
We'd rise and go to bed at eight
Or it may be not quite so late.

Then you should see the nest I'd build,
The wondrous nest for you and me;
The outside rough perhaps, but filled
With wool and down: ah, you should see
The cosy nest that it would be.

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We'd have our change of hope and fear,
Small quarrels, reconcilements sweet:
I'd perch by you to chirp and cheer,
Or hop about on active feet
And fetch you dainty bits to eat.

We'd be so happy by the day,
So safe and happy through the night,
We both should feel, and I should say,
It's all one season of delight,
And we'll make merry whilst we may.

Perhaps some day there'd be an egg
When spring had blossomed from the snow:
I'd stand triumphant on one leg;
Like chanticleer I'd almost crow
To let our little neighbours know.

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Next you should sit and I would sing
Through lengthening days of sunny spring:
Till, if you wearied of the task,
I'd sit; and you should spread your wing
From bough to bough; I'd sit and bask.

Fancy the breaking of the shell,
The chirp, the chickens wet and bare,
The untried proud paternal swell;
And you with housewife-matron air
Enacting choicer bills of fare.

Fancy the embryo coats of down,
The gradual feathers soft and sleek;
Till clothed and strong from tail to crown,
With virgin warblings in their beak,
They too go forth to soar and seek.

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So would it last an April through
And early summer fresh with dew:
  Then should we part and live as twain,
Love-time would bring me back to you
  And build our happy nest again.

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GONE FOR EVER.

O HAPPY rose-bud blooming
  Upon thy parent tree,
Nay, thou art too presuming;
For soon the earth entombing
  Thy faded charms shall be,
And the chill damp consuming.

O happy skylark springing
  Up to the broad blue sky,
Too fearless in thy winging,
Too gladsome in thy singing,
  Thou also soon shalt lie
Where no sweet notes are ringing.

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And through life's shine and shower
We shall have joy and pain;
But in the summer bower,
And at the morning hour,
We still shall look in vain
For the same bird and flower.

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UNDER THE ROSE.

"The iniquity of the fathers upon the children."

Oh the rose of keenest thorn!
One hidden summer morn
Under the rose I was born.

I do not guess his name
Who wrought my Mother's shame,
And gave me life forlorn,
But my Mother, Mother, Mother,

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I know her from all other.
My Mother pale and mild,
Fair as ever was seen,
She was but scarce sixteen,
Little more than a child,
When I was born
To work her scorn.
With secret bitter throes,
In a passion of secret woes,
She bore me under the rose.

One who my Mother nursed
Took me from the first :—
" O nurse, let me look upon
This babe that costs so dear ;
To-morrow she will be gone :
Other mothers may keep
Their babes awake and asleep,
But I must not keep her here."—

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Whether I know or guess,
I know this not the less.

So I was sent away
That none might spy the truth :
And my childhood waxed to youth
And I left off childish play.
I never cared to play
With the village boys and girls ;
And I think they thought me proud,
I found so little to say
And kept so from the crowd :
But I had the longest curls
And I had the largest eyes
And my teeth were small like pearls ;
The girls might flout and scout me,
But the boys would hang about me
In sheepish mooning wise.

Our one-street village stood

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A long mile from the town,
A mile of windy down
And bleak one-sided wood,
With not a single house.
Our town itself was small,
With just the common shops,
And throve in its small way.
Our neighbouring gentry reared
The good old-fashioned crops,
And made old-fashioned boasts
Of what John Bull would do
If Frenchman Frog appeared,
And drank old-fashioned toasts,
And made old-fashioned bows
To my Lady at the Hall.

My Lady at the Hall
Is grander than they all:
Hers is the oldest name
In all the neighbourhood;

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But the race must die with her
Though she's a lofty dame,
For she's unmarried still.
Poor people say she's good
And has an open hand
As any in the land,
And she's the comforter
Of many sick and sad;
My nurse once said to me
That everything she had
Came of my Lady's bounty:
"Though she's greatest in the county
She's humble to the poor,
No beggar seeks her door
But finds help presently.
I pray both night and day
For her, and you must pray:
But she'll never feel distress
If needy folk can bless."

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I was a little maid
When here we came to live
From somewhere by the sea.
Men spoke a foreign tongue
There where we used to be
When I was merry and young,
Too young to feel afraid;
The fisher-folk would give
A kind strange word to me,
There by the foreign sea:
I don't know where it was,
But I remember still
Our cottage on a hill,
And fields of flowering grass
On that fair foreign shore.

I liked my old home best,
But this was pleasant too:
So here we made our nest
And here I grew.

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And now and then my Lady
In riding past our door
Would nod to Nurse and speak,
Or stoop and pat my cheek;
And I was always ready
To hold the field-gate wide
For my Lady to go through;
My Lady in her veil
So seldom put aside,
My Lady grave and pale.

I often sat to wonder
Who might my parents be,
For I knew of something under
My simple-seeming state.
Nurse never talked to me
Of mother or of father,
But watched me early and late
With kind suspicious cares:
Or not suspicious, rather

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Anxious, as if she knew
Some secret I might gather
And smart for unawares.
Thus I grew.

But Nurse waxed old and grey,
Bent and weak with years.
There came a certain day
That she lay upon her bed
Shaking her palsied head,
With words she gasped to say
Which had to stay unsaid.
Then with a jerking hand
Held out so piteously
She gave a ring to me
Of gold wrought curiously,
A ring which she had worn
Since the day that I was born,
She once had said to me:
I slipped it on my finger;

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Her eyes were keen to linger
On my hand that slipped it on;
Then she sighed one rattling sigh
And stared on with sightless eye:—
The one who loved me was gone.

How long I stayed alone
With the corpse, I never knew,
For I fainted dead as stone:
When I came to life once more
I was down upon the floor,
With neighbours making ado
To bring me back to life.
I heard the sexton's wife
Say: "Up, my lad, and run
To tell it at the Hall;
She was my Lady's nurse,
And done can't be undone.
I'll watch by this poor lamb.
I guess my Lady's purse

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Is always open to such:
I'd run up on my crutch
A cripple as I am,"
(For cramps had vexed her much)
"Rather than this dear heart
Lack one to take her part."

For days day after day
On my weary bed I lay
Wishing the time would pass;
Oh, so wishing that I was
Likely to pass away:
For the one friend whom I knew
Was dead, I knew no other,
Neither father nor mother;
And I, what should I do?

One day the sexton's wife
Said: "Rouse yourself, my dear:
My Lady has driven down

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From the Hall into the town,
And we think she's coming here.
Cheer up, for life is life."

But I would not look or speak,
Would not cheer up at all.
My tears were like to fall,
So I turned round to the wall
And hid my hollow cheek
Making as if I slept,
As silent as a stone,
And no one knew I wept.
What was my Lady to me,
The grand lady from the Hall?
She might come, or stay away,
I was sick at heart that day:
The whole world seemed to be
Nothing, just nothing to me,
For aught that I could see.

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Yet I listened where I lay:
A bustle came below,
A clear voice said: "I know;
I will see her first alone,
It may be less of a shock
If she's so weak to-day:"—
A light hand turned the lock,
A light step crossed the floor,
One sat beside my bed:
But never a word she said.

For me, my shyness grew
Each moment more and more:
So I said never a word
And neither looked nor stirred;
I think she must have heard
My heart go pit-a-pat:
Thus I lay, my Lady sat,
More than a mortal hour—
(I counted one and two

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By the house-clock while I lay):
I seemed to have no power
To think of a thing to say,
Or do what I ought to do,
Or rouse myself to a choice.

At last she said: "Margaret,
Won't you even look at me?"
A something in her voice
Forced my tears to fall at last,
Forced sobs from me thick and fast;
Something not of the past,
Yet stirring memory;
A something new, and yet
Not new, too sweet to last,
Which I never can forget.

I turned and stared at her:
Her cheek showed hollow-pale;
Her hair like mine was fair,

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A wonderful fall of hair
That screened her like a veil;
But her height was statelier,
Her eyes had depth more deep;
I think they must have had
Always a something sad,
Unless they were asleep.

While I stared, my Lady took
My hand in her spare hand
Jewelled and soft and grand,
And looked with a long long look
Of hunger in my face;
As if she tried to trace
Features she ought to know,
And half hoped, half feared, to find.
Whatever was in her mind
She heaved a sigh at last,
And began to talk to me.

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"Your nurse was my dear nurse,
And her nursling's dear," said she:
"I never knew that she was worse
Till her poor life was past"
(Here my Lady's tears dropped fast):
"I might have been with her,
But she had no comforter.
She might have told me much
Which now I shall never know,
Never never shall know."
She sat by me sobbing so,
And seemed so woe-begone,
That I laid one hand upon
Hers with a timid touch,
Scarce thinking what I did,
Not knowing what to say:
That moment her face was hid
In the pillow close by mine,
Her arm was flung over me,
She hugged me, sobbing so

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As if her heart would break,
And kissed me where I lay.

After this she often came
To bring me fruit or wine,
Or sometimes hothouse flowers.
And at nights I lay awake
Often and often thinking
What to do for her sake.
Wet or dry it was the same:
She would come in at all hours,
Set me eating and drinking
And say I must grow strong;
At last the day seemed long
And home seemed scarcely home
If she did not come.

Well, I grew strong again:
In time of primroses,

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I went to pluck them in the lane;
In time of nestling birds,
I heard them chirping round the house;
And all the herds
Were out at grass when I grew strong,
And days were waxen long,
And there was work for bees
Among the May-bush boughs,
And I had shot up tall,
And life felt after all
Pleasant, and not so long
When I grew strong.

I was going to the Hall
To be my Lady's maid:
"Her little friend," she said to me,
"Almost her child,"
She said and smiled
Sighing painfully;

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Blushing, with a second flush
As if she blushed to blush.

Friend, servant, child: just this
My standing at the Hall;
The other servants call me "Miss,"
My Lady calls me "Margaret,"
With her clear voice musical.
She never chides when I forget
This or that; she never chides.
Except when people come to stay,
(And that's not often) at the Hall,
I sit with her all day
And ride out when she rides.
She sings to me and makes me sing;
Sometimes I read to her,
Sometimes we merely sit and talk.
She noticed once my ring
And made me tell its history:

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That evening in our garden walk
She said she should infer
The ring had been my father's first,
Then my mother's, given for me
To the nurse who nursed
My mother in her misery,
That so quite certainly
Some one might know me, who . . .
Then she was silent, and I too.

I hate when people come:
The women speak and stare
And mean to be so civil.
This one will stroke my hair,
That one will pat my cheek
And praise my Lady's kindness,
Expecting me to speak;
I like the proud ones best
Who sit as struck with blindness,

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As if I wasn't there.
But if any gentleman
Is staying at the Hall
(Though few come prying here),
My Lady seems to fear
Some downright dreadful evil,
And makes me keep my room
As closely as she can:
So I hate when people come,
It is so troublesome.
In spite of all her care,
Sometimes to keep alive
I sometimes do contrive
To get out in the grounds
For a whiff of wholesome air,
Under the rose you know:
It's charming to break bounds,
Stolen waters are sweet,
And what's the good of feet
If for days they mustn't go?

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Give me a longer tether,
Or I may break from it.

Now I have eyes and ears
And just some little wit:
"Almost my lady's child;"
I recollect she smiled,
Sighed and blushed together;
Then her story of the ring
Sounds not improbable,
She told it me so well
It seemed the actual thing:—
Oh, keep your counsel close,
But I guess under the rose,
In long past summer weather
When the world was blossoming,
And the rose upon its thorn:
I guess not who he was
Flawed honour like a glass
And made my life forlorn,

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But my Mother, Mother, Mother,
Oh, I know her from all other.

My Lady, you might trust
Your daughter with your fame.
Trust me, I would not shame
Our honourable name,
For I have noble blood
Though I was bred in dust
And brought up in the mud.
I will not press my claim,
Just leave me where you will:
But you might trust your daughter,
For blood is thicker than water
And you're my mother still.

So my Lady holds her own
With condescending grace,
And fills her lofty place
With an untroubled face

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As a queen may fill a throne.
While I could hint a tale—
(But then I am her child)—
Would make her quail;
Would set her in the dust,
Lorn with no comforter,
Her glorious hair defiled
And ashes on her cheek:
The decent world would thrust
Its finger out at her,
Not much displeased I think
To make a nine days' stir;
The decent world would sink
Its voice to speak of her.

Now this is what I mean
To do, no more, no less:
Never to speak, or show
Bare sign of what I know.
Let the blot pass unseen;

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Yea, let her never guess
I hold the tangled clue
She huddles out of view.
Friend, servant, almost child,
So be it and nothing more
On this side of the grave.
Mother, in Paradise,
You'll see with clearer eyes ;
Perhaps in this world even
When you are like to die
And face to face with Heaven
You'll drop for once the lie :
But you must drop the mask, not I.

My Lady promises
Two hundred pounds with me
Whenever I may wed
A man she can approve :
And since besides her bounty
I'm fairest in the county

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(For so I've heard it said,
Though I don't vouch for this),
Her promised pounds may move
Some honest man to see
My virtues and my beauties;
Perhaps the rising grazier,
Or temperance publican,
May claim my wifely duties.
Meanwhile I wait their leisure
And grace-bestowing pleasure,
I wait the happy man;
But if I hold my head
And pitch my expectations
Just higher than their level,
They must fall back on patience:
I may not mean to wed,
Yet I'll be civil.

Now sometimes in a dream
My heart goes out of me

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To build and scheme,
Till I sob after things that seem
So pleasant in a dream:
A home such as I see
My blessed neighbours live in
With father and with mother,
All proud of one another,
Named by one common name
From baby in the bud
To full-blown workman father;
It's little short of Heaven.
I'd give my gentle blood
To wash my special shame
And drown my private grudge;
I'd toil and moil much rather
The dingiest cottage drudge
Whose mother need not blush,
Than live here like a lady
And see my Mother flush
And hear her voice unsteady

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Sometimes, yet never dare
Ask to share her care.

Of course the servants sneer
Behind my back at me;
Of course the village girls,
Who envy me my curls
And gowns and idleness,
Take comfort in a jeer;
Of course the ladies guess
Just so much of my history
As points the emphatic stress
With which they laud my Lady;
The gentlemen who catch
A casual glimpse of me
And turn again to see,
Their valets on the watch
To speak a word with me,
All know and sting me wild;
Till I am almost ready

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To wish that I were dead,
No faces more to see,
No more words to be said,
My Mother safe at last
Disburdened of her child,
And the past past.

"All equal before God"—
Our Rector has it so,
And sundry sleepers nod:
It may be so; I know
All are not equal here,
And when the sleepers wake
They make a difference.
"All equal in the grave"—
That shows an obvious sense:
Yet something which I crave
Not death itself brings near;
How should death half atone

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For all my past; or make
The name I bear my own?

I love my dear old Nurse
Who loved me without gains;
I love my mistress even,
Friend, Mother, what you will:
But I could almost curse
My Father for his pains;
And sometimes at my prayer
Kneeling in sight of Heaven
I almost curse him still:
Why did he set his snare
To catch at unaware
My Mother's foolish youth;
Load me with shame that's hers,
And her with something worse,
A lifelong lie for truth?

I think my mind is fixed

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On one point and made up:
To accept my lot unmixed;
Never to drug the cup
But drink it by myself.
I'll not be wooed for pelf;
I'll not blot out my shame
With any man's good name;
But nameless as I stand,
My hand is my own hand,
And nameless as I came
I go to the dark land.

"All equal in the grave"—
I bide my time till then:
"All equal before God"—
To-day I feel His rod,
To-morrow He may save:
Amen.

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DEVOTIONAL PIECES.

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DESPISED AND REJECTED.

My sun has set, I dwell
In darkness as a dead man out of sight;
And none remains, not one, that I should tell
To him mine evil plight
This bitter night.
I will make fast my door
That hollow friends may trouble me no more.

"Friend, open to Me."—Who is this that calls?
Nay, I am deaf as are my walls:
Cease crying, for I will not hear
Thy cry of hope or fear.

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Others were dear,
Others forsook me: what art thou indeed
That I should heed
Thy lamentable need?
Hungry should feed,
Or stranger lodge thee here?

"Friend, My Feet bleed.
Open thy door to Me and comfort Me."
I will not open, trouble me no more.
Go on thy way footsore,
I will not rise and open unto thee.

"Then is it nothing to thee? Open, see
Who stands to plead with thee.
Open, lest I should pass thee by, and thou
One day entreat My Face
And howl for grace,
And I be deaf as thou art now.
Open to Me."

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Then I cried out upon him: Cease,
Leave me in peace:
Fear not that I should crave
Aught thou mayst have.
Leave me in peace, yea trouble me no more,
Lest I arise and chase thee from my door.
What, shall I not be let
Alone, that thou dost vex me yet?

But all night long that voice spake urgently:
"Open to Me."
Still harping in mine ears:
"Rise, let Me in."
Pleading with tears:
"Open to Me that I may come to thee."
While the dew dropped, while the dark hours were cold:
"My Feet bleed, see My Face,
See My Hands bleed that bring thee grace,

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My Heart doth bleed for thee,
Open to Me."

So till the break of day:
Then died away
That voice, in silence as of sorrow;
Then footsteps echoing like a sigh
Passed me by,
Lingering footsteps slow to pass.
On the morrow
I saw upon the grass
Each footprint marked in blood, and on my door
The mark of blood for evermore.

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LONG BARREN.

Thou who didst hang upon a barren tree,
My God, for me ;
  Though I till now be barren, now at length,
  Lord, give me strength
To bring forth fruit to Thee.

Thou who didst bear for me the crown of thorn,
Spitting and scorn ;
  Though I till now have put forth thorns, yet now
  Strengthen me Thou
That better fruit be borne.

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Thou Rose of Sharon, Cedar of broad roots,
Vine of sweet fruits,
Thou Lily of the vale with fadeless leaf,
Of thousands Chief,
Feed Thou my feeble shoots.

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IF ONLY.

If I might only love my God and die!
But now He bids me love Him and live on,
Now when the bloom of all my life is gone,
The pleasant half of life has quite gone by.
My tree of hope is lopped that spread so high;
And I forget how summer glowed and shone,
While autumn grips me with its fingers wan,
And frets me with its fitful windy sigh.
When autumn passes then must winter numb,
And winter may not pass a weary while,
But when it passes spring shall flower again:
And in that spring who weepeth now shall smile,
Yea, they shall wax who now are on the wane,
Yea, they shall sing for love when Christ shall come.

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DOST THOU NOT CARE?

I LOVE and love not: Lord, it breaks my heart
To love and not to love.
Thou veiled within Thy glory, gone apart
Into Thy shrine, which is above,
Dost Thou not love me, Lord, or care
For this mine ill?—
I love thee here or there,
I will accept thy broken heart, lie still.

Lord, it was well with me in time gone by
That cometh not again,
When I was fresh and cheerful, who but I?
I fresh, I cheerful: worn with pain

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Now, out of sight and out of heart;
O Lord, how long?—
I watch thee as thou art,
I will accept thy fainting heart, be strong.

"Lie still," "be strong," to-day; but, Lord, to-morrow,
What of to-morrow, Lord?
Shall there be rest from toil, be truce from sorrow,
Be living green upon the sward
Now but a barren grave to me,
Be joy for sorrow?—
Did I not die for thee?
Do I not live for thee? leave Me to-morrow.

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WEARY IN WELL-DOING.

I WOULD have gone ; God bade me stay :
I would have worked ; God bade me rest.
He broke my will from day to day,
He read my yearnings unexpressed
And said them nay.

Now I would stay ; God bids me go :
Now I would rest ; God bids me work.
He breaks my heart tossed to and fro,
My soul is wrung with doubts that lurk
And vex it so.

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I go, Lord, where Thou sendest me ;
Day after day I plod and moil :
But, Christ my God, when will it be
That I may let alone my toil
And rest with Thee ?

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MARTYRS' SONG.

We meet in joy, though we part in sorrow;
We part to-night, but we meet to-morrow.
Be it flood or blood the path that's trod,
All the same it leads home to God:
Be it furnace-fire voluminous,
One like God's Son will walk with us.

What are these that glow from afar,
These that lean over the golden bar,
Strong as the lion, pure as the dove,
With open arms and hearts of love?
They the blessed ones gone before,
They the blessed for evermore.

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Out of great tribulation they went
Home to their home of Heaven-content;
Through flood, or blood, or furnace-fire,
To the rest that fulfils desire.

What are these that fly as a cloud,
With flashing heads and faces bowed,
In their mouths a victorious psalm,
In their hands a robe and a palm?
Welcoming angels these that shine,
Your own angel, and yours, and mine;
Who have hedged us both day and night
On the left hand and on the right,
Who have watched us both night and day
Because the devil keeps watch to slay.

Light above light, and Bliss beyond bliss,
Whom words cannot utter, lo, Who is This?
As a King with many crowns He stands,
And our names are graven upon His hands;

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As a Priest, with God-uplifted eyes,
He offers for us His Sacrifice;
As the Lamb of God for sinners slain,
That we too may live He lives again;
As our Champion behold Him stand,
Strong to save us, at God's Right Hand.

God the Father give us grace
To walk in the light of Jesus' Face.
God the Son give us a part
In the hiding-place of Jesus' Heart:
God the Spirit so hold us up
That we may drink of Jesus' cup.

Death is short and life is long;
Satan is strong, but Christ more strong.
At His Word, Who hath led us hither,
The Red Sea must part hither and thither.
At His Word, Who goes before us too,
Jordan must cleave to let us through.

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Yet one pang searching and sore,
And then Heaven for evermore;
Yet one moment awful and dark,
Then safety within the Veil and the Ark;
Yet one effort by Christ His grace,
Then Christ for ever face to face.

God the Father we will adore,
In Jesus' Name, now and evermore:
God the Son we will love and thank
In this flood and on the further bank:
God the Holy Ghost we will praise,
In Jesus' Name, through endless days:
God Almighty, God Three in One,
God Almighty, God alone.

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AFTER THIS THE JUDGMENT.

As eager homebound traveller to the goal,
  Or steadfast seeker on an unsearched main,
Or martyr panting for an aureole,
  My fellow-pilgrims pass me, and attain
That hidden mansion of perpetual peace
  Where keen desire and hope dwell free from pain:
That gate stands open of perennial ease;
  I view the glory till I partly long,
Yet lack the fire of love which quickens these.
  O passing Angel, speed me with a song,
A melody of heaven to reach my heart
  And rouse me to the race and make me strong;
Till in such music I take up my part
  Swelling those Hallelujahs full of rest,

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One, tenfold, hundredfold, with heavenly art,
Fulfilling north and south and east and west,
Thousand, ten thousandfold, innumerable,
All blent in one yet each one manifest;
Each one distinguished and beloved as well
As if no second voice in earth or heaven
Were lifted up the Love of God to tell.
Ah, Love of God, which Thine Own Self hast given
To me most poor, and made me rich in love,
Love that dost pass the tenfold seven times seven,
Draw Thou mine eyes, draw Thou my heart above,
My treasure and my heart store Thou in Thee,
Brood over me with yearnings of a dove;
Be Husband, Brother, closest Friend to me;
Love me as very mother loves her son,
Her sucking firstborn fondled on her knee:
Yea, more than mother loves her little one;
For, earthly, even a mother may forget
And feel no pity for its piteous moan;
But thou, O Love of God, remember yet,

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Through the dry desert, through the waterflood
(Life, death), until the Great White Throne is set.
If now I am sick in chewing the bitter cud
Of sweet past sin, though solaced by Thy grace
And ofttimes strengthened by Thy Flesh and Blood,
How shall I then stand up before Thy face
When from Thine eyes repentance shall be hid
And utmost Justice stand in Mercy's place:
When every sin I thought or spoke or did
Shall meet me at the inexorable bar,
And there be no man standing in the mid
To plead for me; while star fallen after star
With heaven and earth are like a ripened shock,
And all time's mighty works and wonders are
Consumed as in a moment; when no rock
Remains to fall on me, no tree to hide,
But I stand all creation's gazing-stock
Exposed and comfortless on every side,
Placed trembling in the final balances
Whose poise this hour, this moment, must be tried?—

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Ah Love of God, if greater love than this
  Hath no man, that a man die for his friend,
And if such love of love Thine Own Love is,
  Plead with Thyself, with me, before the end;
Redeem me from the irrevocable past;
  Pitch Thou Thy Presence round me to defend;
Yea seek with piercèd feet, yea hold me fast
  With piercèd hands whose wounds were made by love;
Not what I am, remember what Thou wast
  When darkness hid from Thee Thy heavens above,
And sin Thy Father's Face, while Thou didst drink
  The bitter cup of death, didst taste thereof
For every man; while Thou wast nigh to sink
  Beneath the intense intolerable rod,
Grown sick of love; not what I am, but think
  Thy Life then ransomed mine, my God, my God.

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GOOD FRIDAY.

Am I a stone and not a sheep
That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy Cross,
To number drop by drop Thy Blood's slow loss,
And yet not weep?

Not so those women loved
Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee;
Not so fallen Peter weeping bitterly;
Not so the thief was moved;

Not so the Sun and Moon
Which hid their faces in a starless sky,
A horror of great darkness at broad noon—
I, only I.

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Yet give not o'er,

But seek Thy sheep, true Shepherd of the flock;

Greater than Moses, turn and look once more

And smite a rock.

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THE LOWEST PLACE.

GIVE me the lowest place : not that I dare
  Ask for that lowest place, but Thou hast died
That I might live and share
  Thy glory by Thy side.

Give me the lowest place : or if for me
  That lowest place too high, make one more low
Where I may sit and see
  My God and love Thee so.

THE END.

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